

Barthélemy Lafon in New Orleans 1792 – 1820.

Jay D. Edwards, Ina Fandrich, Gabriele Richardson.

Edited by Jay Edwards

**A Report to the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation
September 30, 2019.**



**The De La Torre House, 707 Dumaine Street, New Orleans,
Attributed to Barthélemy Lafon ca. 1799. Painting by Boyd Cruise**

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INDEX (Preliminary)

<u>Contents:</u>	<u>Pages:</u>
Introductory Material.	i - iv
Chapter I. INTRODUCTION:	
The Tumultuous Times of Barthelemy Lafon (Jay Edwards)	1 - 42
Chapter 2. BARTHELEMY LAFON (1769-1820):	
A Brief Biographical Overview (Ina Fandrich and Jay Edwards)	43 – 66
Chapter 3. CONQUESTS ON PAPER: A Short History of the Cartography	
of Colonial North American and Louisiana (Gabriele Richardson)	67 - 104
Chapter 4. LAFON AS A SURVEYOR AND CITY PLANNER:	
(Gabriele Richardson with Jay Edwards) (51)	105 – 156
Chapter 5. NEW ORLEANS URBAN LANDSCAPES AND	
ARCHITECTURE ON THE EVE OF AMERICANIZATION:	
Barthelemy Lafon’s Role in Shaping their Character (Jay Edwards)	157 – 232
Chapter 6. LAFON THE PATRIOT: His Military Service during the War	
of 1812, Culminating in the Battle of New Orleans (Ina Fandrich)	233 – 280
Chapter 7. LAFON, THE INAMOUS PIRATE:	
His Double Life as Privateer and Secret Agent (Ina Fandrich)	281 - 296
Chapter 8. REFLECTIONS ON AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE:	
(Ina Fandrich)	297 - 301
SOURCES CITED	303 - 324

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This Report functions as a book submission manuscript for prospective publishers. It is not the final manuscript, as that will await the comments of the readers of the publisher and our final redrafting. Considerable changes may be expected before a final manuscript is accepted. The various chapters were written and submitted to this editor without a great deal of coordination between the three writers. Thus, overlaps and perhaps even missing material may be found in the present draft. The graphic material included herein is not our property to publish. These are low-resolution images, most not fit for publication. Though some of the illustrations were produced specifically for this volume, most of the numerous illustrations are drawn from a wide variety of published sources, or as study images from several archives. Many are not in the public domain. Following acceptance by a publisher, we will request publication rights from the rightful owners (archives and libraries). Thus, the majority of illustrations may not be reproduced or published without the express written permission of the owners. Kindly, do not reproduce or distribute without their written permission.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

Louisiana and the Tempestuous Times of Barthélemy Lafon

Jay Edwards

It was over 200 years ago – in the year 1804. Barthélemy Lafon, a refugee from the French Revolution, was appointed Deputy Surveyor for the Southern District of Louisiana. The Southern District was that portion of the Louisiana Purchase south of the southern border of Tennessee – a huge area. New Orleans was the Capital city of the *Comté* (“County”) of Orleans, which resided in the Territory of Orleans. It included much of the current state of Louisiana. New Orleans had been founded by the French military in 1718. Under a weak French colonial administration the city grew slowly in the early eighteenth century, but when Louisiana was ceded to the Spanish in 1765, it began a more robust expansion. After forty years the Spanish returned it briefly to the French under Napoleon in 1803, and he promptly sold it to the Americans in the same year. Now, New Orleans was in the early stages of a veritable growth spurt. At the same time the world in which Lafon began his new government assignment was an unsettled one.

A vicious, no-holds-barred war was raging through the streets of New Orleans and the fate of the new Louisiana Territory was at stake. No, this wasn’t that battle which would determine the fate of the entire continent -- its ultimate *mêlée* fought out over three weeks in the swamps of the Mississippi Delta and on the planes of Chalmette -- not the battle in which Andrew Jackson with some 6000 mostly untrained citizen soldiers faced off against almost 12,000 of the professional elite of the British military, some battalions fresh from the horrors of their victorious Peninsula Campaign. *That* war would arrive here a decade in the future. No, this was a different kind of war – among other things a newspaper war in which hyperbole, innuendo and vicious aspersions raged. In its own way it was nearly as threatening as what was to come later. The soul of Louisiana was at stake. Its entire future as an American state teetered in a storm of disorder and uncertainty.

New Orleans in 1804 was not much of a city -- a town-sized center, really. It held something on the order of ten thousand people plus many transients.¹ Anglo-Americans consisted only about one-

quarter of the total population, with francophone residents still in the vast majority (Dargo 1975: 10). The “old” francophone residents were divided into three ranked castes by race and legal status: Free whites, free people of color (mostly mulattos), and the enslaved (mostly African blacks).

As the capital of the Southern District of the Louisiana Territory now in its first year, New Orleans governed most, but not all of the present state of Louisiana. Just to the north, in the Felicianas and the Florida Parishes, the Spanish Government still controlled a wide swath of land stretching from Baton Rouge in the west to the Pearl River at the edge of the future state of Mississippi, and on eastward across Spanish Florida. North of New Orleans, Spanish lands extended from the 31st Parallel, the present SW border of Mississippi, down to the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain (Fig. 1.1). Despite Spanish control, West Florida was heavily populated by Anglos. “More British and French people came to Louisiana under Spanish rule than Spaniards” (1769 – 1803; Woodward 2003: 146). The present Louisiana capital of Baton Rouge consisted of a small cluster of houses surrounding a dilapidated Spanish fort. The only section of American Louisiana east of the Mississippi River was similarly small, known locally as the “Isle of Orleans.” It extended from the Iberville River (now Bayou Manchac south of Baton Rouge), down through the marshlands to the mouth of the “bird’s foot delta” of the Mississippi River. It was here in this separated section of Louisiana that the capital city of New Orleans was located (Sibley 1803).



Fig. 1.1. Lafon's Carte General du Territoire d'Orleans, including also West Florida. 1806.

Historic New Orleans Collection.

Health was a major problem in New Orleans. Contagious tropical diseases from cholera and malaria to smallpox and yellow fever ran rampant because of the dismal sanitary conditions and the lack of protection from misquitos. New immigrants were particularly susceptible. As many as one-third of all American immigrants to New Orleans between 1803 and 1805, died following their arrivals. Governor C. C. Claiborne's wife and daughter both died of yellow fever in 1804, and his second wife in 1809.² Little attention was paid to the problems of sanitation, and the city looked and smelled of it. "Refuse from outside toilets, courtyards, and stables drained into the street gutters which emptied into the swamps back of the city.... The stench and corruption of said filth is particularly bad in warm weather."³ Nor would these conditions change much under the enlightened American regime. Governor Claiborne's letter to James Madison in 1809 emphasized the continuing problems of disease and filth in New Orleans. Visitor Lucinda Sparkle reported as late as 1810, "After several days of rain the streets were abysses where

vehicles were dashed to pieces. Pedestrians escaped to the sidewalks about six feet in width. But they were not safe even there. Bridges composed of single timbers spanned the gutters at each end of a square. Large curb-like timbers (*contre-banquettes*) linked the unpaved parts of the sidewalks with the brick-paved sections — “and one had to be an expert in the art of equilibrium to walk the muddy timbers without slipping.” They were inclined in different positions according to the way the earth had settled.⁴ The deep gutters on either side of each street carried stagnant [green] effluent back to the Carondelet Canal at the rear of the city. “After a rain it is scarcely possible to pass the streets for mud & slipperiness.”⁵ “There is no such thing as cleaning the streets that I have seen, further than dragging the mud from the gutters into the middle of the street – when the powerful influence of the sun soon exhales the stench and dries up the filth – otherwise the inhabitants would die of the pestilence....”

The city ran along the outside bank of a great bend in the river. It stretched nearly one mile in length and four blocks deep. Laid out on a grid pattern, it had the beginnings of a suburb just upstream. Along the riverfront, tall-masted deep water sailing ships anchored together with keel boats and flat boats crowding the “*batture*” or shoreline, above and below the center of town. Lumber, cargo and supplies were laid out on the open riverbanks awaiting their transfer to the customs house or to more permanent locations.

An artificial levee, about three feet high, had a flat top perhaps eight feet in width. This was the only protection against the spring floods, and it often failed. It provided the only good public walkway for the ladies of the city, who gathered there for their evening *paseos*, but “filth and rubbish thrown on the *batture* made the “principal promenades of the city odious as well as unsanitary” (Porteous 1932). As evening approached on the riverside, Africans and Indians, noisy sailors, and laborers populated the *batture*, lighting numerous cooking fires in the preparation of their dinners. Soon, they would crowd the levee on their way to local cabarets, gambling dens and “coffee” houses, jostling the strollers in their finery who, having grown up with the nuisance, took little notice.⁶ Fish, meat, and vegetable market pavilions were located below the *Plaza de Armas* (central square) where today their descendants still

stand. Marketing was done mostly between female domestic servant buyers and colored free female stall sellers, each morning between six and eight a.m.⁷ (Pintard 1951: 222, 230-231; Hanger 1994: 212-213).

Visitors from Anglo-America were shocked by the great degree of freedom granted the enslaved. Slaves traveled freely, engaging as contract laborers, mechanics, and domestics. Many “lived under no obligation except that of bringing to their masters a fixed portion of their incomes, beyond which they were free to establish themselves in separate dwellings in various parts of the city, to roam the streets at will, or to frequent their own gambling dens and public houses.”⁸ Worse yet, they showed “little deference to whites... Many armed with knives and pistols in flagrant challenge to all the precautions of the Spanish Black Code” (Tregle 1999: 34-35). Free men of color and those of the white caste remained sensitive and jealous of their privileges in the face of those ranked below them. Fights and sometimes near riots sprang up between those defending their social rights and equality against insults from holders of a supposedly higher cast bent on publically diminishing their status in public (Tregle 1999: 37). The degree of demonstrable independence displayed by the enslaved and the free colored proved an unacceptable affront to immigrating Anglo-Americans -- one which would bedevil race relations in Louisiana until 1861.

Beginning with the administration of Governor O'Reilly (1769-177_), Spanish sovereignty had been of substantial benefit to certain groups of old citizens, particularly the enslaved and the free people of color.⁹ The latter were far freer and better off than their racial cousins in the new southern states of America, and they were far more numerous, amounting to nearly one third of the total permanent population.¹⁰ They worked as artisans, business people, cigar and shoe makers, builders, masons, plasterers, tailors and carpenters. Many quadroon women owned property and rented rooms. Some owned shops or cabarets where blacks and free colored mixed “indiscriminately.” Over one-half of the city’s male residents were bachelors. Free women of color established both rooming houses and bordellos which catered to the enormous population of unattached males. No residential segregation existed in the city. Every street had at least a few free people of color residents. From the 1780s, Conti and Bienville Streets were substantially populated with colored businesses and residents (Hanger 1989: 77). Somewhat

later, Tchoupitoulas, Camp, Julia and New Levee streets were home to houses of pleasure owned by free women of color (Tregle 1999: 35). Quadroons, the kept women of middle and upper class male Creoles, lived in small cottages in the French Quarter. Shotgun style houses began to spring up along Burgundy and Rampart Streets after ca. 1810. Barthelemy Lafon, and many other prominent White French and Creoles lived with long-standing free colored companions – their wives in every sense of the term excepting legal marriage (see Chapter II).

The famous quadroon ladies of the city frequented *bals* (semi-public dances) at the *Salle Chinoise* (St. Philip Street Theater) and the Washington Ball Room, where white gentlemen attended.¹¹ The first of these infamous *bals* is said to have occurred in 1805.¹² Sometimes white women also attended as spies, investigating the “unnatural” attraction of their mates (actual or potential) for high-toned ladies of the duskier sort (Tregle 1999: 36). More importantly, perhaps, Louisiana was unique within the United States in that women, including free women of color, independent of their husbands, could own their own property. This advantage permitted the financial independence of many free women of color who bought, sold, leased and rented their own properties.

In 1804, the centerline of the present city, Canal Street, did not yet exist. In its place stood the *Corderie* of Elias Winter and Daniel Clark, a large corridor-like rope-walk extending from near the levee on the river bank to somewhat past the present location of Bourbon Street.¹³ Faubourg Ste. Marie, was the new uptown suburb above the old defensive ramparts at the upper edge of the French Quarter. It was now rapidly expanding upstream to accommodate the rising number of American opportunity-seekers arriving daily. Old plantations located in what today is the CBD, were being subdivided into planned neighborhoods, a process in which Barthelemy Lafon was also deeply involved.

Nor was New Orleans much to look at in these post-fire years. Laid out on a rectangular grid centered on a large plaza or parade ground, the built-up portion of the city occupied about ten blocks (almost a mile) along the river by four or five blocks (one-third of a mile) deep. Fortified under Carondelet in 1793, the surrounding palisades had deteriorated into indefensible ruins. The cathedral, the government house, and the Presbytere overlooked the *Place d'armes* (now Jackson Square) and the

riverbank, beyond. Houses on Chartres and Royal streets, and those facing the river across the grassy verge that would later become Decatur Street, were built of brick (Sibley 1803: 25-26). There were several handsome houses, two stories tall. Most had been designed and built since the disastrous city fires of 1788 and 1794 -- the old wooden French colonial architecture of the city essentially erased. As one of the most active architects in the city in this period, Barthelemy Lafon designed a number of the new residences (see Chapter 5).

Houses of the better sort had broad balconies across the front and galleries at the rear of the *primer étage* (upper living floor). The *rez-de-chaussée* (ground floor) was often used for shops. Post-fire houses sported roofs of tile or slate, conforming to the fire regulations promoted by the former Governor, Carondelet. Spanish style flat roofs (*azoteras*) surrounded by decorated balustrades adorned some of the best of these houses, such as the house of the Baron Pontalba at the corner of Chartres and St. Peter Streets, across from the Cabildo (Fig. ____). Single or two story kitchens and service structures stood behind, facing the rear patio. Gardens set with geometric parterres and shaded by orange and other fruit trees were popular with those with sufficient lot space.

In the facades of these houses, sliding sash windows were the exception, rather than the rule. French style double doors dressed with rows of small glass panes substituted for windows, the better to maximize through ventilation in this hot country. The vast majority of houses, however, were only a single story tall, constructed of cypress, their hip or gabled roofs covered with wooden shingles or large tapered boards called *merrains*. Tall ungainly chimneys helped to reduce the chances of fires igniting on the roofs of one's neighbors (Fig. ____).

The facades of the better sort of houses were plastered with stucco, colored white or ochre or another pastel. Less grand dwellings were sheathed with clapboards and roofed with wooden shingles (Sibley, et. al. 1803: 25). Most were raised above the damp earth several feet on *pilotis* (wooden blocks or pillars) or brick foundations. Short flights of stairs descended from the front doors onto the banquette, sometimes blocking half its width, much to the annoyance of visiting passers-by. The facades of most houses were situated right against the banquette, often shoulder to shoulder with one-another, or separated

by narrow gated alleyways. One convenience for pedestrians was the *abat vent*, or roof covering, extending about four feet deep out over the banquette. It protected the front of the building and sheltered those beneath from sun and rain. At their backs, even small undecorated abodes had galleries and secluded patios, as out-of-doors living was essential in the summer months. These features of “creole” architecture have survived right to the present in the vernacular architecture of the Vieux Carré and the Creole faubourgs.

Louisiana, 1804-06: The Political Setting

In 2020, if there is one thing that most Americans agree on, it is the feeling that we now live in difficult times. Our democracy is in deepening trouble. We find ourselves divided into polarized camps from which we cannot understand, much less appreciate, the perspective of those on the other side.¹⁴ But, if amid our rampant factionalism we pause for just a moment, we may come to appreciate that history provides an improved perspective on how deeply threatened the American experiment with democracy has been in the past, and how unsettled and stressful were the lives of those who endured those previous chaotic times.¹⁵ The situation in which Barthelemy Lafon worked was one of almost unbelievable turmoil – political, social, legal and personal. New Orleans had, of course, been the capital of French Louisiana from 1723 until 1763 when the French transferred it to Spain. Nominally under Spanish control, it was virtually independent until 1769. Then, Spanish Governor O’Reilly recaptured it following the revolt of the local Creoles who expelled their first Spanish governor Ulloa, in 1765. Following almost forty years of Spanish control, Louisiana was returned to France officially but secretly in 1800, and effectively in 1803. France held sovereignty for a couple of months under Napoleon’s appointed governor, Pierre Clément Laussat, before it was transferred to the United States under the Louisiana Purchase agreement between President Jefferson and Napoleon (Laussat 1993).

Another part of Louisiana was different. West Florida had been a portion of French Louisiana until 1763, when, after the Seven Years War it was transferred to Great Britain. Britain held most of West Florida until 1783, when the Spanish Governor of Louisiana, Bernardo de Gálvez, captured it back

during the American Revolution (McMichael 2008: 10-17). As territory disputed by the United States after the Louisiana Purchase, Spain retained effective control until 1810 when, around Baton Rouge, the West Florida Rebellion established a briefly independent state. Soon, it was incorporated into the United States under Governor C.C. Claiborne and President Madison and absorbed into the Southern District of Louisiana. Thus, depending on where you lived in Louisiana in 1804, three European nations and one new American country competed for your identity. Under this four-way struggle, outcomes were unpredictable. The eventual winner was uncertain, so loyalties tended to be modified situationally, as where French citizens, British royalists, and American settlers willingly swore fealty to the Spanish king of West Florida when the economic and legal opportunities benefited them.

Most of the *ancienne population* of New Orleans was, of course, French Creole. Members of their prominent families had intermarried with Spanish administrators, merchants and military officers. The language of the government was officially Spanish, while that of the street was French. Spanish control during the forty years prior to the Louisiana Purchase meant that many creolized Spanish customs and laws had become accepted and commonplace. The old French *code noir* which had governed the enslaved from 1722 was liberalized under the Spanish, who granted slaves very real rights such as the rite to self-purchase and the right to represent oneself in court. Hundreds of former slaves became *affranchis*, or freed colored people. Many of these were the children of French gentlemen and their African slaves or mistresses.

The resulting Caribbean style three-tiered system of social castes was repugnant to settlers arriving from the United States. Southerners recognized only two castes, the free and the enslaved -- a system closely associated with skin color and other racial features. The conception of the a Spanish legal system in which thousands of free, often light-skinned and educated black people could own businesses, property, plantations and even their own slaves, and who possessed most of the legal rights of free whites, so shocked American sensibilities that they would struggle for decades to overturn it.

Under Spain, the power of the Louisiana Governor was mitigated and often contested by the representative governing council, the *cabildo*.¹⁶ Curiously, this principal governing council of the Spanish

colonial government was largely controlled by French Creole planters and wealthy local businessmen. Like the French before them, the Spanish had established a multi-headed form of colonial government with less-than-clear lines of authority. During the last decades of the eighteenth century many nagging unresolved issues had stymied the colonial government.

The leaders of Louisiana's colonial government disagreed even on vitally important issues. One, for example, was the codes for rebuilding New Orleans following the fires of 1788 and 1794. A would-be settler paid an official surveyor a survey fee. Copies of the survey were authorized by the Governor or the Intendant in New Orleans, and were deposited in the public land office in New Orleans (Sibley 1803: 43; McMichael 2008: 18-23). The great fires had destroyed the official survey records of most of the settlers, though theoretically, copies might still in the possession of the land holders. Ultimately, the King of Spain owned all public lands and only he could determine land grants and tariffs, generally through his Royal Council, or through an appointed local official. The cabildo, technically, was granted the right to control lands in New Orleans territory in order to further to development and secure good order. But the cabildo remained timid in exercising control over such decisions as who should obtain public lands for the good of the community, and whether buildings ought to be condemned if they were fire hazards. Disputes between the cabildo and the Governor were often submitted to the King, requiring several years to resolve.

Beginning with Governor O'Reilly, the Governors exercised more actual power over the control of royal lands. This was also true for building codes. After the fire of 1788, Governor Carondelet asked the cabildo to establish a new building code which would stop the erection of large wooden structures because of their potential as fire hazards (see pp. ____). In 1795 this was done; rules requiring that fireproof buildings be built were published.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the new building codes were largely ignored because they required much greater expense of materials--beyond the affordability of most residents. Brick was expensive. Better quality brick and tile was manufactured on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain and better-yet "hard" brick was soon being imported from Philadelphia. Slate and tile were also imported by ship, multiplying the cost of a house.

When the cabildo attempted to enforce the codes by razing a number of small temporary and highly flammable houses, Governors Gayoso, Casa-Calvo, and Salcedo (Carondelet's successors), refused to enforce the edicts, and even argued that poor people should be exempted from the prohibition on building wooden houses. Governor Manuel de Salcedo, particularly, overrode the cabildo, leaving the matter of enforcement unresolved. It remained in that state until 1803 when Spain relinquished its sovereignty over Louisiana.¹⁸

The Multi-Sided Political Conflict and Its Leaders

Perhaps nothing dramatizes the nature of public life in Louisiana in the late Spanish and early American periods more than the colorful cast of personalities who rose to leadership (Tregle 1999: 98-130). Even before the American Revolutionary war, Anglo settlers were arriving in West Florida seeking inexpensive farmland and low taxes. Under British control, something on the order of fifteen-hundred Anglo-American refugees had arrived from the former thirteen colonies between 1775 and 1781. When the Spanish captured the territory they continued the former policy, encouraging disaffected loyalist refugees to settle (McMichael 2008: 15-16). Anglo-Americans soon followed. When the Louisiana Purchase became imminent in 1802, Louisiana was suddenly translated into the Land of Opportunity. American malcontents, failed politicians, and those seeking easy paths to power and new wealth were attracted to New Orleans and the American Southwest. The weakly defended Spanish colonies of Mexico, Texas and Florida were suddenly in play. There, the rapidly expanding United States must surely conquer in the near future. Thomas Jefferson's vast new Louisiana territory was interpreted by many as a temporary arrangement from which entirely new nations might quickly rise. Here was opportunity for quick movers and bold actors. Internal conflict and an uncertain future meant that by being in the right place at the right time to take advantage of those easily lead, influential opportunists with the will to control their fates might become powerful and rich. All that was necessary was to assemble a personal army sufficiently large to foment the core of a revolt among the present homesteaders. This would initiate a revolution.

Since Anglo-Americans were the principal land owners of Spanish West Florida, it represented an easy first target.

Filabusters

While today, this term denotes oral take-overs of the Senate chamber with the purpose of stopping imminent legislation, in the last years of the eighteenth century it carried a vastly different significance. Filibusters (from the Dutch term for freebooters) were gangs of lawless raiders – land pirates really. They fell upon unsuspecting plantations, farms and even territories and plundered them (McMichael 2008: 76-101). People were killed and others captured and held for ransom. Filibustering also refers to the actions of freelance military raiders. They were most successful on the frontiers where law enforcement was minimal. Usually after a sudden foray they retreated back to sanctuaries and sold their plunder in local cities through middlemen. In Spanish West Florida their booty included livestock, enslaved Africans, and household valuables such as silverware, fancy fabrics, furnishings, and particularly, weapons. Filabusters left havoc in their wakes. They were exceptionally difficult to trap and to bring to justice.

No sooner had the Louisiana Purchase been completed than Spanish West Florida became, once again, the target for American filibusters. Chief among these were the Kember brothers: Reuben, Samuel and Nathan -- headstrong and rawboned American backwoodsmen. The problem was that in their rush to populate their new territory, the Spanish administration in West Florida had provided a highly attractive policy of land distribution. Beginning in 1787 they welcomed Anglo-American settlers. All that was required to receive a grant of up to 800 superficial *arpents* (947 acres) was for the settler to reside on and improve his land over four years and to swear loyalty to the King of Spain (McMichael 2008: 19-20). He should also be available for militia duty. For many Anglo-Americans this was apparently no problem at all. An attitude of Manifest Destiny was assumed by most. Vigorous American expansion in the west would sooner or later overwhelm the weak Spanish borderlands. In West Florida, there were no large estates and therefore, no serious class distinctions between an elite and an underclass. Spanish laws limited the possibility of the control of vast swaths of land by wealthy speculators, such as had happened

in Kentucky and Tennessee (McMichael 2008: 23-26). So long as it could protect them from rampant criminality and economic exploitation, American settlers were more than happy with the Spanish administration. By 1803, John Sibley could report that the east side of the Mississippi River around Baton Rouge was composed of some Acadians, a few French, but mostly Americans (1803: 23).

Unfortunately, this liberal Spanish policy attracted a less-than-honorable element – opportunists looking to make a quick buck and not too careful about how they did it. Some engaged in land speculation while others were failed adventurers or pioneers who had gone bankrupt elsewhere. Beginning in the 1770s, the town of Bayou Sara, a port settlement on the Mississippi River (near where St. Francisville is located today) became a popular way station for flatboat and keelboat crews. It was there that many settlers from the American states began their search for new opportunities.

Records show that in 1799 one Feliciana land owner from Ohio, John Smith, established a contract with Reuben Kemper. Kemper was the son of a Virginia Baptist minister, previously a bookkeeper for Smith, and a friend of the wealthy Irish-American businessman, Daniel Clark (McMichael 2008:83). Smith was a land speculator. He hired Kemper and his brothers to live on his Feliciana property and manage both it and a dry goods store which he set up. Using the Kempers, Smith, a U.S. senator from Ohio, hoped to return to his home in Cincinnati while evading the Spanish residency requirements. Within two years his venture had failed. Smith determined to get rid of the Kempers, who had run up debts and failed to produce a profit from the store, but the Kemper brothers continued to live on Smith's property, and Smith even sold 200 acres of his Feliciana holdings to Reuben and Nathan Kemper. At the same time Samuel Kemper had acquired other properties and Nathan Kemper held a separate 1000 arpent tract of land in West Feliciana (McMichael 2002: 133).

Eventually, Smith petitioned to have the Kemper brothers removed from his property. In June of 1804, this was accomplished by a local *alcalde* (sheriff-like magistrate over local legal matters and petty crimes). The Kempers fought the expulsion and had to be removed by force with the aid of local militia (McMichaels 2008: 85-86). Thus began a series of assaults on Spanish West Florida by the Kempers and their gang. It rose to as many as thirty-eight armed and mounted American raiders, mostly from across the

international boundary in and around Pinckneyville, Mississippi (American territory north of the 31st parallel). The raids were directed mostly against the Spanish leaders, but other large landowners also suffered. The Spanish *alcalde* Vincente Sebastian Pintado, appears to have been particularly singled out for attacks. He was simultaneously the head land surveyor of West Florida. He declared the Kempers “bandits” and “state criminals,” which meant that their land holdings in Spanish West Florida would be confiscated. If caught, they would be jailed. Their raids soon took on the aura of an open political rebellion. The filibusters attempted to convince local American landowners to rise up against the Spanish government. They carried a blue and white striped flag containing two stars on a blue field. They distributed a written proclamation of independence, authored by Edward Randolph, a Pickneyville resident and partner of Daniel Clark: “Throw off the galling yoke of [Spanish] tyranny and become freemen,” he proclaimed. The Kempers boasted that they had the backing of Louisiana Governor, William Claiborne, but if such backing existed, it must have been secret for there is no paper trail (McMichael 2008: 93-96). On the other hand, the refusal of Governors Claiborne (New Orleans) and Williams (Mississippi) to capture and deliver the Kempers to Spanish Governor Grand-Pré in Baton Rouge suggests to some a considerable sympathy on the part of powerful American authorities for regime change in Spanish West Florida.

On August 7, 1804, the Kempers attacked again. They burned Pintado’s house and cotton gin and kidnaped him. They moved on to Baton Rouge in an attempt to capture Governor Grand-Pré, but forewarned by one of Pintado’s slaves, Grand-Pré had strengthened the dilapidated fortifications and assembled the volunteer militia. No local American residents joined the rebellion, but many joined the Baton Rouge District militia to defend it against the Kempers, who were forced to release their hostages and flee back to Mississippi.

The Kemper raids continued for weeks thereafter, but strengthening resistance by the Spanish authorities soon drove them from the United States and eventually all the way to New Providence Island in the British Bahamas, where many post-revolutionary British loyalists had settled. Daniel Clark attempted to intercede for the Kempers with Governor Grand-Pré, but he was sternly rebuffed. Thus, the

first revolt against the Spanish in West Florida was a complete failure, and probably represented more banditry than political rebellion. American cum Spanish settlers had shown that they would stand up to revolutionary filibusters. That was a sentiment which would survive for another six years, until the successful West Florida Rebellion of 1810 created a new, short-lived independent political entity in Spanish West Florida.

This is not quite the whole story of the lawless Kempers, however. Following the successful rebellion, some of them did return to Louisiana in time to participate in the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. The previous year, Reuben Kemper joined the Feliciana Dragoons. Andrew Jackson provided an opportunity for his redemption when he employed Kemper as a spy and scout during the British invasion below New Orleans. Together with a company of Feliciana militia, Kemper reconnoitered the British invaders on Bayous Mazant and Bienvenu. Over a number of days they mapped the locations of the British staging areas without ever being observed. “No individual in Jackson’s whole army preformed more efficient service” (Remini 1999: 120).

Burr’s Conspiracy and Daniel Clark, Jr. in the Orleans Territory

A surprising number of America’s most infamous and seditious characters arrived in New Orleans between 1803 and 1806. The force of their charisma and the complexities of their hidden agendas and secretive power-grabbing plots would foment a special kind of chaos in the Louisiana territory. Many of the wealthier class of Americans were remarkable men – leaders of great personal magnitude who rallied followers through bombastic promises of future glory. At the same time they extolled social divisiveness - conflict between different nations, races and social classes. A surprising number of these would-be revolutionaries were Freemasons. From the time of the American Revolution, a substantial proportion of the leaders and political activists of the new United States had been Freemasons. Their legacy is the stamp which they placed on the American constitution with its Bill of Rights and guaranteed freedoms from State Religion and from governmental control of free speech. But even prior to 1803 in Spanish Louisiana, Freemasonry was widespread. Influential members of the Creole community belonged to their

own newly established French-speaking lodges in New Orleans. A high proportion of the Anglo-American leadership concerned with Louisiana also consisted of Freemasons. These included the Governor, C.C. Claiborne, Aaron Burr, Nathaniel Green, James Madison, Edward Livingston, James Monroe, and General of the American Army, James A. Wilkinson.

Following the Louisiana Purchase, secret political plots in favor of the establishment of new territories in Louisiana, Texas, Mexico and West Florida suddenly sprang up. Between the contenders: Spain, France, Great Britain and the United States, supporters were divided. The power vacuum of the Spanish Southwest attracted many diverse interests. Among the Anglo community were those in favor of carving the Spanish Southwest into new nations. Others considered this treasonous and struggled against such machinations.

Most of the excellent riverside farmland between New Orleans and Baton Rouge had already been granted, though many planters had not yet converted their holdings into sugar plantations. Sugar was the new white gold from which enormous profits would be made in the coming years.¹⁹ North of Baton Rouge, cotton cultivation would play a similar part in the future economy. The potential for enormous wealth beckoned, and its lure glowed like a beacon in the darkness to American opportunists such as the filibuster, George Rogers Clarke, the Texas Indian horse-dealer Philip Nolan, and the wealthy Louisiana businessmen Edward Livingston and Daniel Clark, Jr. Self-styled leaders were soon selling visions of prosperity to eager ears. Successful merchants, lawyers, politicians, and military men from Ohio, Kentucky and the East broadcast their visions of free land, rising wealth, and political independence to all those who would listen. The foot-soldiers of these proposed revolutionary movements were backwoodsmen who participated deeply in an anti-governmental perspective shared throughout trans-Appalachian culture.²⁰

Then, on the morning of July 11, 1804, In New Jersey, the Vice President of the United States murdered the former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, who was also a Revolutionary War hero, aide-de-camp to General George Washington, and principal author of the Federalist Papers. The murder was the result of a duel in which Aaron Burr shot and killed Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton was a West Indian

Creole turned Revolutionary War hero and a leader of the American Federalist Party. Dueling was illegal and defined as murder in New York and New Jersey if one of the contestants died.²¹

In the contested national election of 1800, Thomas Jefferson finally won the election and Aaron Burr with the second highest number of votes in the House of Representatives became an isolated Vice President, shunned by the leaders of the country. Burr blamed Hamilton for his loss. It was to Hamilton, more than any other person, that Jefferson owed his victory. The ambitious Burr would not soon forget it. “[W]ith his national political career in ruins, and wanted for capital murder in two states, the dapper, impulsive, and audacious New Yorker traveled westward, hoping to build a base of support in the southwest. Like other Americans before him, he headed for New Orleans” (Dargo 1975: 51).

Among Burr’s friends and colleagues was General James Wilkinson, a powerful American military leader and a longtime paid agent of the Spanish in Louisiana. Wilkinson’s cipher number as a Spanish informant (spy) was No. 73 (Wheeler 2009: 20). Much of his correspondence with the Spanish was in code. These letters are held in the *Archivo de Indias* in Seville, and many have been recently decoded and translated by historians. It was the Spanish who controlled navigation on the Mississippi River. “Spain closed the river to all foreign ships in 1784, attempting to deny the Americans any share of the economic benefits from Spain’s military victories” against the British (Woodward 2003: 153). Wilkinson had been cooperating with Spanish officials since 1786. The following year he met with the Spanish Governor of Louisiana, Esteban Miró, who granted him *personally* the exclusive right to navigate and trade on the Mississippi River. Wilkinson was permitted to transport a specified amount of tobacco from Kentucky to New Orleans free of duty -- a highly lucrative monopoly.²² In return, Wilkinson was to work to separate Kentucky and its restive anti-authoritarian frontiersmen from the United States and to bring it into the orbit of Spain (Wheeler 2009: 25-27). But, Wilkinson had also been recently appointed the commanding General of the United States Army in the Mississippi Valley. As such he had intimate knowledge of the best held secrets of the Spanish Governors, of Aaron Burr, and of President Jefferson regarding the events in, and their plans for, the Mississippi Valley and the Southwest.

Many historians believe that Burr's ultimate plan was to detach all of southwestern Louisiana from the Union and establish an entirely new nation in Spanish Texas and West Florida with its capital in New Orleans. Many of the American settlers in Spanish West Florida were believed by would-be leaders to hold deep animosity against the Spanish. They looked forward to driving the Spanish out of Louisiana and Texas (Drago 1975: 52). But invasion and war against Spanish possessions represented treason in Jefferson's United States. The President was not inclined to attack another powerful European nation so soon after our struggle for independence from Great Britain. Burr, on the other hand held no love for Jefferson's Democratic Republican Party, then in power. Burr was an exceedingly persuasive man. He quickly obtained promises of financial support from several quarters. He was sold (granted?) a portion of the so-called Bastrop Lands along the Ouachita River in Lower Louisiana to use as a base for gathering his new American army composed of young frontiersmen. No sooner had Burr reached New Orleans in June of 1805, than he made contact with "The Mexican Association," a group of some three hundred local men including leading figures. They were devoted to initiating a war between the United States and Spain, and eventually liberating all of Mexico (Dargo 1975: 56). With Burr in New Orleans, the city was awash with rumors. For months the issue was in doubt. According to President Jefferson, Burr's plan was to "seize New Orleans, plunder the bank there, possess himself of the military and naval stores, and proceed on his expedition to Mexico (Thomas Jefferson's Message on the Burr Conspiracy to the Congress, 1807). Everything depended upon co-conspirator, James Wilkinson. Spain had, and apparently was still, rewarding him handsomely. Would the General support Burr and the Mexican Association in a new war against Spain, or would he support Thomas Jefferson and the Republicans, seeking to diffuse the threats against Spain and its southwestern territories? In the fall of 1806, Wilkinson, headed for Louisiana.

Wilkinson's first problem was to end the imminent threat of a war between Spain and the United States along the Sabine River – the border between western Louisiana and eastern Texas. In this, the General was successful. He negotiated the Neutral Ground, a free zone between the Spanish and

American armies. Soon, this de-militarized strip of land became a haven for all kinds of outlaws, smugglers, and undesirables seeking to escape justice.

By the fall of 1806, President Jefferson was being fully informed about Burr's plots and his progress in the southwest, perhaps partially by Wilkinson, himself. By mid-November, Governor C.C. Claiborne of Louisiana wrote to James Madison (then Secretary of State), "I am now advised that the union of States is seriously menaced, and that the Storm will probably break out in New Orleans." Claiborne identified an old political enemy, Daniel Clark, Jr., now Louisiana Territory's elected delegate in Congress, as a leading figure among the "thousands" concerned in the plot (Dargo 1975: 53-54). Widespread fear and a siege mentality gripped New Orleans. On November 25, General Wilkinson moved there "to prepare its defenses" against Burr's coming onslaught. Andrew Jackson, commander of the Tennessee militia and another intimate of Aaron Burr, wrote to Claiborne: "[O]rganize your Militia, and defend your City as well against internal enemies as external.... I fear you will meet with an attack from quarters you do not at present expect. Be upon the alert – Keep a watchful eye on our General.... I fear there [is] something rotten in the State of Denmark.... Beware of the month of December" (Dargo 1975: 54). Wilkinson was widely known for his duplicity and for weeks his course of action remained a mystery. Both Wilkinson and Daniel Clark Jr., believed that they should have been appointed Governor of the Southern District of the Louisiana Territory in 1803, instead of the lack-luster and hesitant C. C. Claiborne. Claiborne, incidentally, was Thomas Jefferson's distant cousin, and towards him Wilkinson harbored considerable dislike. Instead of moving his troops north to meet Burr's force in the field, General Wilkinson concentrated them in the city, the better, perhaps to enforce a *coup d'etat*. But beginning in the first week of December, Claiborne and Wilkinson together worked to shore up New Orleans's defenses. The city had never been attacked and its defensive fortifications were falling to pieces. New palisades were constructed and Carondelet's five forts at the corners of the city were re-strengthened. Troops were mustered and the navy placed in readiness (Dargo 1975: 55).

It appears that Wilkinson had previously decided to turn on his former close associate, Burr. Wilkinson kept his plans secret as he met with and interviewed many local New Orleans Burrrites and

members of the semi-secret Mexican Association. “[T]heir belief in his own complicity was the one weapon he had to use against them (Dargo 1975: 56).

Finally, in mid-December in New Orleans, Wilkinson initiated a “reign of terror” against the Burrites. In a flurry of military arrests over the next month, the General incarcerated numerous leaders who claimed that the arrests were illegal. Wilkinson appealed to Governor Claiborne for a proclamation of martial law. The Governor refused, but the military arrests continued. People in New Orleans could talk of nothing else but the unfolding plots and conspiracies which were falling to pieces around them. Lawyers for those arrested filed writs of habeas corpus in the Superior Court to obtain their releases, but Wilkinson was too swift for them, shipping the leaders off to Baltimore for trial. Governor Claiborne was the head of the Louisiana Militia. When the courts appealed to him for military support, he refused. As an added benefit in so doing, he assisted in the destruction of the careers of some of his worst political enemies. Editors of local newspapers critical of Wilkinson’s high-handed tactics were quickly silenced by drafting them into the Army. Citizens were pressured to inform on their neighbors and associates, and government officials were threatened with the loss of their jobs. Search and seizure tactics rained throughout the city and ships on the Mississippi were stopped and searched.

Despite the illegality of the martial law-like arrests and interrogations, the Burr conspiracy was now doomed, though its effects in Louisiana would linger on for years. The actions of Wilkinson were directed completely against the English-speaking community. None of the French community participated in Burr’s machinations. Rather, they remained neutral or supported the Governor, and he in turn would honor their loyalty in many future decisions which benefited their views. From the Mayor of New Orleans down, much of the existing Anglo power structure of New Orleans was removed in a widespread purge which benefited the francophone community. Governor Claiborne’s old antagonist, Daniel Clark Jr., still in Washington D.C., was not implicated, though many of Clark’s closest associates in New Orleans were identified as co-conspirators. Burr, himself, surrendered to the authorities in Mississippi, but escaped, only to be recaptured and sent to Richmond, VA, for trial. In the end, the jury adopted a narrow definition

of treason and acquitted Aaron Burr. He was subsequently indicted for different crimes in several states. He fled to Europe never to return.

Civil Law vs. Common Law

One of the most pressing problems plaguing the new American administration in Territorial Louisiana was the issue of which kind of law should govern Louisiana. The Civil Law codes of Spanish and French Louisiana were based, ultimately on the Roman theory of law. It was a theory which held that the making of law was far too complex and difficult to be left in the hands of common people. Learned specialists would establish a Civilian Law Code which would take care of essentially every contingency and which was fare to everyone. Judges would be highly educated in the application of this universal code. They would administer it in practice without reference to their own personal biases and predilections.

Anglo-American Common Law, arising out of the political history of England, derived from a fundamentally different assumption about governance. The Common Law is ultimately a defense against autocratic kings and arbitrary governments. It emanated from the approved decisions of common people in the form of juries, together with judges. Once a decision has been rendered by a jury and tested, the principle that it represented was thereby enshrined in the codes of the nation and employed as a determining guide in all future cases upon which it bore. This approach is recognized under the Latin name *stare decisis* (precedent rules).

It is difficult to overstate just how antithetical these two approaches to the law are. This was the conundrum which faced President Thomas Jefferson and his administrators in 1803. If Louisiana was to be admitted to the United States, its law practices must not stand in fundamental conflict with those of the other states and the nation at large. On the other hand, getting the long-established Creole population of Louisiana to agree to a system of law which they neither understood nor trusted might very well result in a revolution more serious than the one which had taken place in New Orleans thirty-five years previously (1768), when a new Spanish Governor, Antonio de Ulloa, attempted to impose a much more familiar and compatible system of Civil Law on the French citizens of Louisiana. Ulloa's administration had been

insensitive to the Louisiana citizenry and injurious to the established economic practices of the French colony. He was driven out in a bloodless coup. Once in revolt, the Spanish had to retake Louisiana by force in 1769. The new Governor, Alejandro O'Reilly, regained possession of the colony, suppressed the Creole rebellion, and established a surprisingly enlightened administration. He reformulated the French colonial law code into the Roman-influenced, Spanish-based Code O'Reilly. Although Louisiana's Creole planters had particular issues with this new code, particularly in regard to the rights it afforded the enslaved, they adopted it quickly and used it successfully for the next thirty-four years (Fernandez 2001: 4-15). Every important issue, from land rights, to court proceedings, to the component parts of Louisiana's government with their rights and duties, was detailed in this now long-familiar code.

What happened next is one of the best illustrations of the rule of thumb -- it is impossible to predict which twists and turns history will take in the future. In 1804, it would have been perfectly reasonable to assume that the *ancienne population* of Louisiana would struggle to retain its Spanish-based Civil Code, while the Anglo-American power structure would attempt to impose an American style Common Law system in Louisiana. But that is not really at all what happened.

To be sure, an important segment of the French Creole population did reject the American conception of Common Law and fought to have the Spanish system of Civil Law encoded for American Louisiana. Supporters of this approach included Etienne Mazureau, Louis Moreau Lislet, François Xavier Martin, Peter Derbigny, and Pierre Soulé, all successful lawyers and office holders (Tregel 1999: 111-113). Their combined efforts were relatively ineffective against the combined weight of the American President's power to appoint governmental officials during the eleven years of the Territorial Period. But, even more influential in the defense of a Civil Law code for Louisiana were two powerfully effective American individuals.

The Creole population of Louisiana supported Governor C.C. Claiborne during the Burr Conspiracy, and even more vigorously during the War of 1812. In turn, Claiborne became much more sympathetic to their desires. In the early Territorial Period, Claiborne's principal political enemies were not limited to French politicians and lawyers. They also included members of the Anglo-American

community who were disappointed with the cautious nature of his administration and its lack of favoritism towards themselves. Successful Louisiana businessmen such as Daniel Clark Jr., and Evan Jones, had been among this number, but so were new arrivals from the North. Foremost among these was the brilliant and aggressive lawyer, Edward Livingston. Livingston was a member of the politically powerful Livingston clan of New York State. In fact, Livingston was educated at Nassau Hall in the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University). After graduating, he, together with Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, studied law with John Lansing (Fernandez 2001: 74). Curiously, under Lansing, Livingston developed a passion for Roman law and a nearly miraculous ability at codifying the law.²³

Livingston was an admirer of Burr who cooperated with him politically. Livingston's star rose rapidly in New York State. He was elected to the bar in 1785. He rose in the new Democratic-Republican Party. In 1794, he was elected to the House of Representatives and was still seated during the contested election of 1800, in which Aaron Burr's votes were tied with those for Thomas Jefferson for the presidency. Hating Thomas Jefferson and favoring Burr, Livingston had to be strongly persuaded by his older brother and Chancellor of New York State, Republican, Robert R. Livingston, together with Federalist Alexander Hamilton. Eventually, they convinced Livingston that it was in his best political interest to abstain from voting for Burr. That helped Jefferson to be elected President, something Burr later blamed on Hamilton rather than his brother, Robert. As his reward, Jefferson appointed Livingston Federal Attorney for the Southern District of New York. It was a step too far for the young, self-centered and pleasure-seeking Livingston. In 1803, he was indicted for diverting public funds, fired, and in 1804, prosecuted and fined \$100,000.00 – an enormous sum in those years. Broke and under indictment, Livingston, like Burr, fled to a Louisiana in which such men might prosper, less encumbered by their pasts.

Organized resistance against the imposition of American legal practices began simultaneously. While the Creoles liked the protections which Common Law jury trials afforded the accused in criminal matters, they did not like the use of that mechanism as a way of solving civil suits and property rights. Those matters had been relatively easy to solve under Louisiana's Spanish law, but the use of juries in

such matters brought swarms of American lawyers to Louisiana, much to the distrust of the francophone citizens. Edward Livingston was only one example. The Creoles united in the Louisiana Remonstrance of 1804, in which objections to Common Law innovations were raised and debated in public meetings, publications, and memorials to Congress (Dargo 1975: 17-19).

All of this was prelude to one of the most amazing careers in Louisiana's long history. Edward Livingston arrived in Louisiana in 1804 with one hundred dollars in his pocket, yet within a few years he had become one of the richest men in the territory (Tregle 1999: 119). He represented land-wealthy men such as the Baron de Bastrop. In lieu of cash payment for his attorney's fees, Livingston sometimes ended up with vast land holdings – in this case, title to six-tenths of the Bastrop River lands, some of which Aaron Burr had also mysteriously acquired. Soon, he defended Robert Fulton and his own brother Robert Livingston, who together attempted to obtain exclusive rights to the use of steam power in Louisiana Territory (they lost). Livingston defended the pirates Laffite following their arrests in 1814. For this he received handsome fees, without so much as meeting them face to face (Tregle 1999: 120). And, in 1815, Livingston sold a vast quantity of live oak timber to the U.S. Navy for an amount of money which would have cancelled his enormous fine from the Federal Government. The government voided the contract when it discovered that Livingston held no valid title to the woodlands upon which the live oak trees stood. Livingston did have some Territory-shaking wins as well. Much to the disgust of the Creole citizenry, in 1805 he defended Jean Gravier who claimed private title to much of the Mississippi River *batture* in Faubourg St. Marie (Louisiana, Law Library). This was in clear opposition to the long-standing rule in French Louisiana that the *batture* lands, between the waterline and the levee, were public lands for the temporary use of anyone. The case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and Livingston prevailed. Eventually though, the wily Thomas Jefferson appropriated most of the contested *batture* properties, though Livingston's profits from land sales permitted him to clear his debt to the government (Tregle 1999: 120-121).

As Livingston's law practice developed into one of the Territory's largest, he became increasingly dissatisfied with the way that the law was being practiced in Louisiana. He frequently lost his

cases through what he considered capricious interpretations by local judges -- “Judge made law,” as he termed it. Governor Claiborne’s judicial appointments were often not up to the task of sorting through the welter of British, American, Roman, Spanish and French legal principles and legal precedent with the aim arriving at a coherent “mixed system” of law that Louisiana could live by. Skilled judges who might have succeeded, retired or quit instead, leaving Claiborne to appoint a minor league judiciary (Fernandez 2001: 28-30). Livingston increasingly allied himself with Civil Law champions of the *ancienne population* (Fernandez 2001: 58). One result was his liberal use of the *Digest of 1808*, a compendium of historical Civil Law employed in Louisiana prior to 1803.²⁴ Criminal law was also compiled separately at the same time, producing a convenient source for understanding the laws in force in Louisiana at the time of the Purchase. However, the Common Law-oriented judges of the Louisiana Superior Court refused to accept these sources as binding. They were interpreted, rather, as a pattern of practices to be considered together with other tenants more acceptable to the American Common Law.

In 1812, the newly minted State of Louisiana adopted a new Constitution and appointed a new Supreme Court. Both were patterned along the lines of an American Common Law state (Fernandez 2001: 41-56). The constitution, however, enshrined important principles favorable to the Creole population. The Governor, and all Senators and Representatives in the bicameral legislature, had to be white, male, landed property owners of some duration. To vote, one had to be listed on the tax rolls, and that consisted largely of persons wealthy in land, slaves and draft animals. This class of citizens was heavily populated by Louisiana Creoles and fewer wealthy white Americans. The arrangement almost guaranteed that the Creoles would continue to exert political domination in the foreseeable future (Tregle 1999: 55-63). So, while local offices remained well-populated by Civil Law oriented Creoles, Anglo-Americans completely dominated the appointments and higher decisions which flowed down from the Federal government. Offices such as federal judges, district attorneys, and land surveyors were included among these appointments (Tregle 1999: 71).²⁵

The Supreme Court of the United States continued to enforce Common Law decisions upon Louisiana, as in the *batture* case. However, in the immediate post-statehood period, the Louisiana

Supreme Court cleverly side-stepped the rising dominance of Common Law practice. It ruled in a number of landmark cases that the Spanish laws of Louisiana had never been repealed by Laussat at the time of the Louisiana Purchase. Thus, using *stare decisis* against the Common Law itself, the still valid Civil Law codes of Spanish Louisiana were interpreted as established code, continuing to determine important issues such as contract law. Property claims were better protected. The established interpretation of dowries and inheritances protected widows and their children on the death of a husband. In a round-about way, the unique mixed system of Louisiana law had prevailed. Livingston lost several important cases and bitterly attacked the system wherein local judges rendered capricious decisions, uninformed by the disorganized and uncoded system of traditional law. Judges, he argued, should discover the law, not make the law (Fernandez 2001: 76). In response, in the 1820s, Livingston helped to craft a monumental Civil Code for Louisiana, one of the outstanding feats of American jurisprudence, but one which was never adopted by Louisiana's legislature as completely established law.

Livingston, like many of his Anglo-American predecessors who had settled in Louisiana, fits into a common personality pattern well-articulated by the historian Joseph Tregel (1999). The pattern is important because it shaped the everyday lives of citizens of New Orleans living in the Territorial and early post-statehood periods. Skilled and articulate but exceptionally egotistical leaders dominated much of the public discourse and the shaping of the Louisiana that was to follow. Highly visible local residents such as Barthelemy Lafon knew these people personally, did business with some, and were directly affected by their actions, both their successes and their failures.

One fundamental problem in Territorial Louisiana was the extreme differences of background and culture among the several groups vying for power. "No other state seems to have been so seriously affected by ethnic cleavage as Louisiana in the early nineteenth century" (Tregle 1999: ix). In 1803, the long-term outcome of the struggles between powerful contenders: England, France, Spain, the United States, and the revolutionary-oriented filibusters, was fluid and full of uncertainty. In such an environment, loyalty to any one camp was often situational. Players switched sides without so much as a backward glance when they saw opportunity. "With traditions so mixed, interests so fluid, and a society

still in the process of being formed, no hard crystallization of mores or set tenor of ways had yet appeared to discourage the individuality and unbridled pursuit of one's own ends which dominated the great mass of the population.... Thinking in terms of social or community responsibility seldom occupied much time, here, and few felt inclined to worry about the hindmost" (Tregel 1999: 20). More than the heat and disease, cupidity and ambition contributed to the ebullient instability of the ante-bellum state. "Group suspicions and hatreds fed on the isolation from each other occasioned by differences of language and tradition and battered on the resentments bred by inevitable competition for political and economic power" (Tregle 1999: 23). "No other frontier demanded more alertness to guile, more sensitivity to evil, or more resistance to considerations of justice and mercy.... Grasping for wealth... brutalized the citizens, "cutting great inroads into personal and public honesty and draining the society of those energies and visions which might have contributed to the fashioning of a life better suited to moral and rational beings and twisting its leadership into ambitious seekers-after-power, impatiently vying for the right to rule, rather than to serve" (Tregle 1999: 43).

As a result, corruption and litigious conflict continued to dominate the political and public arenas, as did disinterest in the support of public services. Funds which might have supported public education for the vast majority of children evaporated. Those who could afford to, sent their children out of state. Public institutions of all forms withered or failed to develop. These included intellectual groups, libraries, medical institutions, and religion itself. Few of the male gender ever went to mass. Due to its rebellious, anti-doctrinaire clergy, between 1791 and 1820, no Catholic bishop dared to set foot in the St. Louis Cathedral (Tregel 1999: 47). Social, ethnic and national divisions of society served the interests of self-absorbed leaders, used largely as vehicles to further their political purposes. Divide and conquer was the rule. It was this chaotic environment which offered an enormous attraction to a particular kind of opportunist -- Anglo-American, French, and Spanish.

The following are only some of ways in which these leaders were described verbally and in print in the newspapers: Of Edward Livingston, it was said, "Neither American nor Creole, he was devoted only to himself. He was a legal genius, one of the greatest jurists of nineteenth century America, but he

had no personal integrity – he only thought in terms of his own advantage and enrichment. He was unsocial and soulless.... Every attribute of mind to be admired without one quality of heart to be loved” (Tregle 1999: 116-117). Of other local leaders, the term “superlative” does not begin to describe the sentiments expressed. Of James Wilkinson: “He was a born charmer...easy, polite and gracious... [with] an uncanny ability to read people” (Soodalter 2017:43). He “was, in fact, a consummate rogue and self-aggrandizing, avaricious provocateur whose actions bordered on—and frequently embraced—espionage and treason, threatening the very well-being of his country.” “In all our history there is no more despicable character” (Soodalter 2017: 42). “Utterly devoid of conscience, he didn’t hesitate to betray supporters or accept remuneration from a hostile foreign government for the betrayal of his country’ (Soodalter 2017:47).

Of Daniel Clark, Jr., one of his best friends said: “he is deficient in dignity of character & sterling veracity to fill the office of Governor” (Morgan to Price, 1803: 9). Pierre Clement de Laussat stated: “Clark was possessed by restlessness and a craving for domination and distinction.... Even though he repeatedly said that he did not seek any prominent position, he found it strange that anyone else but he had been charged with the confidence of his government, and he could not disguise his grudge” Laussat. 1978: 94). Of another leader, a common and widespread sentiment: “Envious, suspicious, emotional, and proud, he remained blind to any but his own point of view, frequently flying into a rage at the slightest opposition.”

The Newspaper War

The one institution which *did* flourish in this contentious atmosphere was the Newspaper. Like the internet and social media of the early twenty-first century, the newspaper was new to New Orleans. It quickly became the dominant vehicle for the spreading of unrestrained political and cultural antagonism. Though a few newspapers such as the *Moniteur de la Louisiane* (1794 – 1815) adhered to a conservative and fact-based editorial policy with only occasional polemical tirades, most reveled in partisanship and offensive personal attacks on political enemies (Marino 1966: 310-311). The *Moniteur* was the first

French language paper to thrive in New Orleans. It soon became the voice of the former inhabitants of Saint-Domingue, the previous home of its first editors. It was common practice in the newspapers of the day to reprint articles from Northern newspapers and even from European sources, un-referenced. The *Moniteur* at least, noted the sources of reprinted articles.

Barthelemy Lafon often ran ads, and even occasional opinion pieces in this paper. Later, as the editorial policies and readers changed over the years, he also selected other newspapers for his classified ads. He changed to English, perhaps appealing to the most receptive audience of potential buyers:

-

MONITEUR DE LA LOUISIANE No. 33

Planches de cipre de toutes proportions, en
gros & en detail, à vendre comptant.
Longueur de 8 jusqu' à 18 pieds.
Largeur de 10 jusqu' à 30 pouces.
Épaisseur de 6 jusqu' à 30 lignes.
Le tout assorti & convenable à tous
Les ouvrages de menuiserie,-
s'adresser à M. Lafon, architecte

Lundi, 25 Juin de l'année Commune 1798.

[Cypress Planks of all sizes,
Wholesale and retail, for cash.
Length: from 8 – 18 feet [of Paris].
Width: from 10 – 30 inches.
Thickness: from 6 – 24 *lignes* [8th of an inch].
Apply to Mr. Lafon, Architect]

(June 25, 1798)
[Holmes 1961: 244-45]

MONITEUR DE LA LOUISIANE
No. 318

M. Lafon desirerait trouver une Personne qui
connût un peu le métier de Charpentier, & qui
eut les connaissances nécessaires pour
conduire son habitation de Chef-Menteur; il
lui sera des conditions avantageuses.

Samedi 20 Novembre de l'année commune 1802.

L'Ami des Lois.

Feb. 6, 1816.

P. 2.

FOR SALE.—A Library, containing the following works :

Encyclopedia,	123 volumes.
Belles Letters,	74
Mathematics, Natural	
Philosophy,	94
Astronomy, Geography,	
Travels,	84
Travels in America.	75
<hr/>	
In all,	445

Two Mahogany Bureaus, with glass book-cases on top. A French Curricule large enough for three persons, mounted on Pognac springs, and closing up in time of rain ; with a horse and harness complete for three.

That fine concession between the city and suburb, having a superficies of about 8 acres and a half. It will be sold in whole or in part and a good title given.

The tract of land called *Ghef Menteur* containing 35,000 superficial arpents, which will be sold on very reasonable terms altogether or in part.

Three Tracts below the city, fit for raising sugar, and free from inundation—he will guarantee that there are at least 500 arpents capable of culture.

A Tract at the mouth of Lafourche, on the right bank, being a part of the plan of Donaldsonville.

Three Tracts situate at Bellevue in Opelousas ; each of 400 superficial arpents.

The whole of the above property will be sold on very reasonable terms, and Bills of Exchange on the Havanna, the Atlantic States, or France, taken in payment. Apply to

B. LAFON.

Competition for the newspaper-buying public arose at the time of the Louisiana Purchase with the establishment of the bilingual *Le Télégraphe* (1803- 1811) and *Le Courrier de la Louisiane* (1807-1860). Certain newspapers were purchased by Americans. They modeled their new products upon the stridently political newspapers of New York City. The *Louisiana Gazette* was Federalist-oriented while the *Orleans*

Gazette was strongly Republican and Jeffersonian in editorial its policies. Both, and particularly the latter, were highly critical of Governor C. C. Claiborne. The Governor became the object of a continuing stream of abuse while almost never defending himself. “The...[*Orleans Gazette*] was not one month under its vituperative new manager, James Bradford, when the first of a series of unsettling articles over the signature of “AN INHABITANT” appeared in print. The INHABITANT, whom Isaac Briggs thought to be either Daniel Clark, John B. Prevost, or Edward Livingston, adopted the role of “Public Accuser.”²⁶ His “accusations were among the most strident ever recited in the territory” “The governor was accused of running an administration “uniformly masked with weakness, vanity and error” (Dargo 1975: 42-43). Isaac Briggs referred to it as: That “torrent of abuse lately poured out upon him in the news-papers... compounded of gross misrepresentation, base falsehood and bitter, tho’ I trust impotent, malevolence” (Dargo 1975: 26). These critiques multiplied Claiborne’s personal sufferings in other ways. Duels were fought over the unsupported accusations. Claiborne’s own brother-in-law was a fatality in one such duel (Dargo 1975: 44). Claiborne fought in another with Daniel Clark in June of 1807 in which he was wounded and spent months convalescing (Dargo 1975: 195, Note 100). Claiborne was also occasionally defended in articles published in several papers, particularly the *Louisiana Gazette*. At long last by 1808, he had had enough. He sacked the *Orleans Gazette* as the printer of the public record, and selected a more sympathetic paper, the *Union*. Claiborne’s years of refusal to answer his editorial attackers resulted in a serious loss of prestige for, and a rise in mistrust in, the Louisiana government. One result was his inability to recruit able office-holders (Dargo 1975: 41). All the while the Newspaper War continued as New Orleans newspapers raged against one-another in editorials and commentaries.²⁷

Foreign Intrigues

Both French and Spanish citizens in Louisiana hoped that the Louisiana Purchase was temporary; that their own nations would come to their rescue before very long. In the early Territorial Period there was good reason for believing that this might be the case. In the year 1800, Napoleon Bonaparte arranged for the transfer of Louisiana back to France through the secret treaty of San Ildefonso. It was part of a far

grander plan in which Napoleon's forces would recapture the colony of Saint-Domingue, once the richest colony in the world, and use it as a base for a new French empire in the Caribbean and the Gulf, including Louisiana. The Gulf Coast would provide foodstuffs for the sugar-producing slaves of Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe and Martinique (Kukla 1993: 2). In 1800, Napoleon planned to send a French Army of three thousand troops to Louisiana under General Claude Victor to enforce his American ambitions (Gelpi 2007: 407). He sent Pierre Clément Laussat to New Orleans to organize the French takeover.

Unfortunately for him, his French forces in Saint-Domingue failed to retake that colony due to yellow fever and the guerilla tactics of the rebel armies. Napoleon's own brother-in-law, General Leclerc, the commanding officer of the expedition, died of the disease before the French withdrew in 1803. So, when James Monroe and Robert Livingston began negotiations with the French in Paris, they were astounded to learn of Napoleon's desire to sell, not just New Orleans, but all of French Louisiana to the Americans – a deal which they readily accepted for the paltry sum of fifteen million dollars. Napoleon, too, benefited. He had unloaded a costly burden and kept it out of the hands of his principal enemy, Great Britain.

Over the following years a pro-Napoleon faction split the identities and loyalties of the Louisiana Creoles between Napoleonistas and those who favored the revolution with its anti-slavery and pro-democratic views. Some free people of color favored the Jacobean philosophy, raising the mistrust of white Creoles and American planters who wanted no repeat of the Haitian revolution in Louisiana.

Both Spanish and French government officials remained in New Orleans after the American cession, ostensibly to complete the business of their governments in withdrawing from the colony. However, they continued to meddle in everyday political and legal affairs, causing Governor Claiborne yet more headache. In 1803, Claiborne wrote to Secretary of State Madison of "twenty to thirty French men of Bordeaux and Saint-Domingue who wish to propagandize for Napoleon and for French rule and disparage the United States" (Vernet 2010: 205). The Spanish Marquis de Casa Calvo, arrived in May of 1803. He inserted himself into the business of government, arguing, for example, for the overturning of the results of a sensational American jury trial. Eventually, as foreign officials were replaced by Claiborne appointees, the Old World government officials gradually lost their effectiveness. Laussat

moved to Martinique in 1804, and Claiborne removed Casa Calvo and other Spanish officials from American Louisiana in 1806 (Bradley 1972: Pt. 1: 303-307; Vernet 2010: 211-214).

Spain remained in control of West Florida. It continued to contest American dominance by imposing shipping embargoes on adjacent waterways, including the Mississippi River. These threatened the livelihood of many French and American traders in the Isle of Orleans and beyond. In response, the Americans blockaded Lake Pontchartrain, Bayou Manchac and the Mississippi River. By 1807, Spain was struggling against Napoleon's invasion of its homeland. President Jefferson had been cautious and diplomatic towards Spain, but the new American President, James Madison, was aggressive, threatening the use of force. Claiborne took control of West Florida in 1810 with the Sabine River defining the western boundary of American Louisiana (Bradley 1972).

The Creoles were ambivalent about the American succession for other reasons as well. Under both French and Spanish administrations trade had been highly controlled, at least in theory. The two nations shared a mercantilist philosophy. The purpose of colonies was to make the mother country rich, and that was accomplished by taxing and controlling trade and bringing the riches of the colonies home where it could be exploited. Raw materials and agricultural products were shipped home, while manufactured goods were sold back to the colonists at a healthy profit. Trade with other nations, particularly the old enemy, Great Britain, was acceptable only under the direst of circumstances when other solutions were unavailable.

Under a mercantilist system, the only ways for a local colonial trader to become wealthy were illegal – smuggling and privateering chief among them. “To a large extent smuggling satisfied the rising demand for goods in [eighteenth century] Louisiana and elsewhere in the Spanish world” (Woodward, Jr. 2003: 134). In the final years of Spanish sovereignty these had not been severely suppressed. In 1803, Claiborne and the newly minted American government officials had little appreciation of the vast networks of illegal trade which were operating under their noses (Clark 1970: 232). Much of the commerce of New Orleans depended upon them. Unrecorded sales and secret negotiations were commonplace in the coffee houses of New Orleans. Much of this “dark” commerce was lubricated by

social relationships and by membership in secret societies. Among the most important of these were the Masonic lodges. Several of the prominent French-born architect-engineers of New Orleans had become deeply enmeshed in them. Arsene Lacarrière Latour, and Barthelemy Lafon were among them. The Lafittes were also Freemasons (Masonic Order, *Tableaux* of 1812 and 1815). They ran a vast trading network, landing captured goods and slaves at Baratavia, south of New Orleans, and transporting them through the bayous into the city or to other locations where they were sold. Governor Claiborne reported that their number of participants in the Lafitte ring amounted to at least five hundred souls.

Many of their brother members of the French Masonic Orders of New Orleans were also involved in political intrigues. The same was true of American Freemasons, including Arron Burr, William Dunbar, Henry Clay, Edward Livingston, General James Wilkinson, Governor Charles Cole Claiborne and in 1814, General Andrew Jackson (Kesting 1994: 21). Even the Spanish popular priest, Friar Antoine Sedella cooperated closely with the Masons (Garragoux 2017: 74). He ran an espionage network for the Spanish which included the commanding general of the American Army, James Wilkinson (Spanish “pensioner” No. 73), and also Latour and Lafon (Spanish “pensioner” No. 45).²⁸

To promote a veil of legality, the privateers sometimes worked with letters of mark from newly “independent” nations such as Cartagena, and more often not. The American leaders were slow to catch on to the breadth and tenacity of this form of commercial activity, but when they finally did, they discovered that even surveyors and architects such as their own official Barthelemy Lafon had long been active privateers with their own armed corsairs. At different times Lafon had commanded four armed raiders whose names have been recorded (listed on p. ____). A substantial proportion of the commerce of New Orleans depended on such illegal activities, and it would not be forfeited easily. When, in 1814, the Americans finally reacted against the pirates, events were rushing toward a nation-shaking climax.

The War of 1812

In the early summer of 1814, the War of 1812 had yet to touch the Gulf Coast with any seriousness beyond trading embargoes, but that was about to change. Increasingly, global events stimulated turmoil on the local scene. France had undergone its revolution only a few years after the successful American Revolution, opening the way for the rise of the First Citizen. Soon Napoleon was fighting Britain, then Spain. Central and South American colonies, including Mexico, were beginning the struggle for independence from Spain. Spain was losing its power to control its colonies in North and South America. England and the United States competed to see which would next control these vast lands. The key to much of this lay in and around New Orleans, where the war of 1812 finally arrived in December of 1814, launching the city onto the world stage in a most dramatic way, and paving the way for a new president for the United States. This occurred just a few years after the Haitian Revolution (1791-1803) reached its crescendo, sending forty to fifty thousand French refugees to other parts of the Atlantic World, including Baltimore, Philadelphia and Charleston. New Orleans would not be far behind. Between May and September of 1810, a deluge of Haitian refugees, cast out of the Spanish empire, would descend upon the Crescent City. They doubled the size of the city in a single year – a refugee crisis against which those of our times pale into insignificance. Refugees were crammed into attics and spare rooms, and into shacks and newly built little houses located on spare lots, most located in the Quadroon Quarter of the French Quarter, and Faubourgs Tremé and Marigny (Lachance 1998). They would revolutionize the vernacular architecture and the culture of the city. From the American perspective, not only were the refugees French speaking, but about one third were free people of color and another third were enslaved. Slaves were forbidden from being imported into Louisiana by law after 1808, but many of the white and free people refugees claimed that their entire livelihoods were dependent on free access to their slaves. If they could not bring their slaves into Louisiana, they would become wards of the state. Claiborne finally acquiesced to their entreaties.

Then, there were technological advances such as the development of the steam engine. Robert Fulton's first successful steamboat, the "New Orleans," reached New Orleans from Pittsburgh in 1811.

The steamboat alone would revolutionize the commerce and multiply the wealth of New Orleanians, attracting vast numbers of Anglo-Americans who poured into the city to seek their fortunes. The successful granulation of sugar (1796) and the development of the cotton gin (1794) transformed the agriculture of the state into a wealth-producing powerhouse, requiring new institutions such as banking houses, commercial exchanges, auction houses, newspapers, coffee houses and infrastructure including water and sewage systems. Hotels would soon rise up, but before that, the demand for rooming houses and hostels would revolutionize the economy of the middle classes including the large population of free people of color. All of this and much more meant that New Orleans held, in these years, the most dynamic and unstable society in the United States. Such transformations in concert with one-another could not help but exert powerful and unpredictable influences on the character of life in Louisiana.

Then, on top of it all, in the fall of 1814, the British attacked with a huge army and navy, easily capable of overwhelming the miniscule defenses of the Gulf Coast and the Isle of Orleans. That story, and Barthelemy Lafon's role in it, is briefly recounted in chapter 6. Suffice to say that it would completely disrupt his life and the lives of those around him. Here, our final thought is to point out some of the ironies of the saga of Louisiana during its most contentious era.

Historians agree that it was a close thing. Louisiana might very well have stayed Spanish, or become French or British in this period, except for the complex intersection of extraordinary events and unintended consequences. Most of the Americans seeking opportunity in the new American southwestern territory did not really like what they found here. They hated the French language and the Spanish system of government. They hated the environment, the heat and the mosquitos. They hated the floods, the humidity, the rains, and the bad weather. They hated the dense cypress forests and the swamps. They hated the epidemics of yellow fever and cholera. The stagnant water in the ditches (become sewers), and the mud of the unpaved streets of New Orleans disgusted and frustrated them. They disliked the near total lack of public services, even education. They feared what they saw as backwardness, immorality and corruption among the French Creoles, and particularly they hated the Caribbean style caste system which included a very substantial population of arrogant free people of color. The immigration of thousands of

colored and black people into New Orleans frightened them. Worse yet, there were militias -- battalions of armed colored people who probably sympathized with the rampant anti-slavery propaganda of the period. New Orleans was a nest of pirates and Jacobins. Some people slept with rifles under their beds in fear of imagined slave uprisings like those in Saint-Domingue and Point Coupée Parish. Business practices were immoral and backward. Cabaret and gambling den operators would cheat and rob Americans at every chance. Nor, did the Creoles even respect the Sabbath, staying open for business during the holy hours. The Catholic Church was for years the only recognized organized religion in the southern district of Louisiana. Good Protestants had long rebelled against what they saw as a corrupt and immoral papistry. Newcomers also disliked the legal system, which they did not understand. They resented the seeming arbitrariness and near dictatorial promulgations of the post-colonial leaders -- Governors, judges and military men. One of the principal favored activities of Creole gentlemen seemed to be to discover new ways to avoid paying taxes and circumventing legal ground rules. They hated the nonchalant willingness of locals to switch loyalties and to betray friends when it was to their advantage. In Louisiana, disloyalty ruled. They even hated the French contredances played in *bals*, preferring good American music reels instead. Indeed, for backwoods Americans, Louisiana was one aggravating place to spend one's life.

Ironically, it was many of those same things that the Americans disliked most which saved Louisiana for the United States. The swamps and the foul weather stymied the British military in their attempts to establish a firm footing for their invasion of New Orleans. The complex riparian and swampy geography defeated their attempts to transport heavy artillery, shot and powder, to those locations where it was needed. The dense forests hemmed in their battalions. Without the ethnically mixed military defense erected by Jackson, the trained and experienced British regulars would have quickly overwhelmed American defensive lines. Pirates, rebels and revolutionaries, blacks, whites and free people of color, Creoles, Frenchmen and Kaintucks, all miraculously united into an impenetrable force when it suited their interests. Together, they simply annihilated the columns of attacking British regulars. Among these, it was the criminal element, Laffite's pirates who, perhaps more than any other, established a

bulwark against which even the British artillery could not stand. Previously, Laffite had switched loyalties, even to his eventual disadvantage. He led the British on when offered very substantial rewards for his help, but he supported Andrew Jackson when it came down to deciding who should rule Louisiana. Some of the finest military minds there, were the “corrupt” French architect-engineers like Barthelemy Lafon, who thought like tacticians and who designed defenses which perhaps should not have held out against the British onslaught, but did. In the end, American Louisiana survived its most perilous test, but many of the old guard would pay the eventual price for their service to our country.

NOTES

¹ Sibley, et. al. 1803. *An Account of Louisiana to Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States*. Providence, R.I.

accessed at: <<https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbe0001.2003gen10852/?st=gallery>>

² Winters, 1969: 201-202.

³ Porteous, Laura L. 1932. Sanitary Conditions in New Orleans Under the Spanish Regime, 1799-1800. *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 15: 614.

⁴ DeGrummond 1961. Lucinda Sparkle. *Louisiana History* 2(3): 345-48.

⁵ Pintard, 1936. New Orleans, 1801: An Account by John Pintard. *LHQ*: 223-224.

⁶ “Probably no community in the world revolved so much around its grog shops, cabarets, gambling dens, circus pits and theaters as did this Mistress of the Mississippi.” The “coffee house” functioned as “barroom, meeting hall, reading room, restaurant, and general recreation center” (Tregle 1999: 20-21).

⁷ Pintard 1951: 222, 230-231; Hanger 1994: 212-213.

⁸ In 1805, of those tallied, the population of New Orleans consisted of 3,551 whites, 3,105 slaves, and 1,566 free people of color, according to a census. Free blacks, women and Indigenous people were seriously undercounted in these censuses (Hanger 1994: 206).

⁹ Under the Spanish, the population of whites in New Orleans almost doubled, the population of slaves rose 250 percent, and the population of free people of color rose 1,600 percent (Hanger 1994: 207).

¹⁰ Hanger 1994: 205.

¹¹ In New Orleans in the Antebellum period, the racial designation “Quadroon,” for quarter-blooded African-American, was generalized to refer to light-complexioned free women of color (Aslakson 2012: 714).

¹² Gehman 1988: 14; Kmen 1999; Aslakson 2012: 719-720.

¹³ Lafon survey of the *Corderie* of Elias Winter and Daniel Clark, 11/23/1805. Edwards and Fandriich 2018, Vol. I: 184-185; Edwards and Fandrich, 2018, Vol. II: 188-189.

¹⁴ Only under increasing discomfort do we tolerate those who articulate the reasoning behind the perspectives of the other. In government, compromise and mutual respect have all but disappeared.

¹⁵ In 1802, Louisiana Frenchman, Armand Duplantier, wrote a letter to his brother in which he stated, “The colony is in a state of crisis and the colonists are so uncertain of their fate that they are not committing themselves to any type

of enterprise” (Duplantier 1802, from Duplantier’s Letters 1796-1807. Baton Rouge, LSU Library Special Collections; LH 47(4):455).

¹⁶ Din and Harkins 1996.

¹⁷ Edwards, Jay, 2015. Acts of the Cabildo, 1800/06/14. In Creole Cottage Vignette No. 8, Post-fires Zoning Ordinances in New Orleans 1795-1818. *The New Orleans Creole Cottage: America’s Atlantic-World House*. A Report to the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation. Pp. 272-274.

¹⁸ Refer to pp. ____ for a discussion of the effects of the anti-fire regulations. See also: Lafon, Barthelemy Surveys, Volume 3. pp. 49, 54, 170, 178, 193.

¹⁹ Louisiana and Florida sold 1,576,9333 pounds of sugar to the United States in 1802 (Sibley 1803).

²⁰ This frontier mind set was, itself, a remnant of the stridently individualistic, anti-authoritarian values of the troublesome Savo-Karelian Finns, who had been transported as undesirables from southern Sweden to the Delaware River Valley in the 1640s and 50s (Jordan and Kaups 1989: 67-82; Wheeler 2009: 40). The Finns influenced later-arriving Scots and Irish settlers as they moved westward into the Appalachian highlands and beyond. As frontiersmen they were the epitome of rugged individualists who felt crowded when they could see the smoke from a neighbor’s chimney. They hated governmental authority of all kinds and believed in the cult of personal liberty and self-achievement. They were skilled in the use of hunting weapons and steeped in Indian culture, and together, as the word of the political disarray of the American Southwest and the Spanish territories spread, they envisioned unparalleled opportunities there. Indian tribes in East Texas and western Louisiana were also in play as participants in the proposed invasions of the weakly-defended Spanish Southwest (Kesting 1994: 23).

²¹ Probably more than any other person, Hamilton had succeeded over enormous political resistance in obtaining sufficient votes for the adoption of the Constitution of the United States as a replacement for the weak Articles of Confederation (Chernow 2004). He was also a political enemy of Aaron Burr who, after thirty-five ballots, had lost a vote to Republican Thomas Jefferson for President of the United States in the U.S. House of Representatives on February 15, 1801.

²² Spain reopened Mississippi River trade to the Americans in 1788. This was made all the more important due to the great New Orleans fire of that year, necessitating the shipment of relief supplies which the Spanish could not supply (Woodward 2003: 154).

²³ Essential to Civil Law Codes properly administrated (Fernandez 2001: 74; Tregle 1999: 116-118).

²⁴ Written by James Brown and Louis Moreau Lislet: Fernandez 2001: 33).

²⁵ Until 1812, the office of Surveyor for the County of Orleans and the Southern District of Louisiana had been led by Barthelemy Lafon, appointed in 1804.

²⁶ Issac Briggs was the Surveyor General of the Louisiana Territory and, together with James Brown, one of Thomas Jefferson's chief informants in the Southwest. He was in effect, Barthelemy Lafon's boss from 1804. Lafon became Député de l'Arpenteur-Général pour le Comté d'Orléans. Daniel Clark was the chief anti-Claiborne propagandist according to another observer, Nathaniel Evans.

²⁷ The *Orleans Gazette* and the *Télégraphe* were the principals in the continuing intermural combat (Dargo 1975: 195, Note 97).

²⁸ Garrigoux 2017. Pp. 5, 98, 107.

CHAPTER 2

BARTHELEMY LAFON (1769 – 1820):

A Brief Biographical Overview

Ina Fandrich with Jay Edwards

Barthelemy Lafon's recently discovered *Survey Book No. 3* provides a new window into the life of its author. It helps to fill out our portrait of the French-born surveyor, engineer, geographer, mathematician, astronomer, ship captain, architect, city planner, theatre impresario, politician, real estate investor, planter, businessman, and sometimes privateer and spy for foreign governments. In this chapter we explore all too briefly, the life of this amazing and creative individual who lived in New Orleans against a backdrop of remarkably unsettled times (Edwards and Fandrich, 2018, 2 Vols.).

On December 20, 1803, the Louisiana Purchase was signed into effect in the Cabildo, the colonial governor's mansion, located next to St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. At that point, the vast Louisiana Territory from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico became property of the United States, and the American government, Louisiana's new rulers, almost immediately bestowed on Lafon a very important assignment. He became "the approved surveyor" of the newly established "Territory of Orleans South of Tennessee." *Survey book No. 3* should actually be called *Survey Book No. 1*, because it is in fact the first in temporal order, while Nos. 1 and 2 continue his record of land surveys in later years. Book No. 3 provides abundant information on what Lafon was doing during his first two years in office. This is an area of his life previously little documented. At the beginning, we see him copying survey plans of his predecessor, the highly respected Spanish surveyor general, Don Carlos Trudeau, known as Mr. Charles Laveau Trudeau in French. Lafon had big shoes to fill and was obviously eager to continue the work that Trudeau and his predecessors before him had started. Lafon's surveys have striking resemblance with Trudeau's. Lafon, however, had to adapt simultaneously to the new rules and conditions that the city's new administrators, the Americans, brought with them. As soon as the Louisiana Purchase was signed, the vast former French and Spanish colonial territory was subdivided into a Northern and a Southern

district. Named for its capital, New Orleans, the Southern district was called the “Territory of Orleans South of Tennessee.” William C. C. Claiborne was appointed its new governor and Lafon its “approved surveyor.”

Both had their hands full, challenged with the daunting task of creating a new system that would satisfy both the unique local population of French and Spanish Catholics, including a significant number of free people of color. The *ancient population* (pre-American residents) of the area had long been accustomed to life in a monarchy. Almost immediately, the Anglo-Protestant newcomers sought to “assimilate” Louisiana into the Jeffersonian Empire based on British common law, Anglo-Protestantism, and lofty ideas of republicanism in the style of ancient Greece and ancient Rome. This was not going to be an easy task, but Lafon didn’t miss a beat. He threw himself into his new assignment with an enthusiasm, precision, and dedication that distinguished his entire professional life. The sheer volume of surveys he has left to posterity speak for themselves and attest to his remarkable skills and his indefatigable productivity.

As we can see in *Survey Book No. 3*, Lafon was a quick learner. Within a few months he found his own vocabulary. He clearly preferred French as his operative language, but he could read and write in English and Spanish.¹ A year later, in 1805, he had developed his own official standardized form, printed bilingually, for the description of his accounts of each survey. French was still an official language of the Territory of Orleans, a status it now shared with English.² He continued using the same form until Louisiana became the eighteenth State of the United States in 1812, and ceased to be a territory. As becomes evident throughout this volume, Lafon was a busy man. He could hardly stay up with all the demands for land surveys. At times, he commissioned another French-born surveyor, Jean-Baptiste Pène, to assist him. He also hired scribes to write many of his survey *process verbals* (warrants, descriptive of the procedures of each survey). Hence, much of his survey books are not written in Lafon’s handwriting,

¹ Most of the surveys are written in French, some are in Spanish, and one early survey is entirely written in English (Lafon, *Survey Book No. 3*, pp. 142-143)

² The standardized printed bi-lingual survey form first appears in *Survey Book No. 3*, pp. 190-92, dated October 7, 1805.

although most of the survey plans as well as various additional notes and later inserted plans and warrants from as late as 1819 were drafted by him.

In these early American years, an incredible rush for land unfolded in Louisiana. Much of Lafon's job as the chief surveyor consisted not only of verifying land grants, land purchases, and establishing exact borderlines between the large neighboring rural French "long lots" (plantation properties; Edwards and Kariouk 2004: 128-130, 162-163). It also included carefully measuring the borderlines between the urban lots in the city of New Orleans, where every inch counted. He was also in charge of evaluating land for its potential usage. In other words, he traveled up and down Louisiana's newly established districts to assess which parts of the land were useful for "culture" meaning for cultivation (either suitable for agriculture or for urban development) and which parts were swampy wastelands. He also documented water bodies and other topographical and cultural features. Frequently, we encounter him in Southern Louisiana's ubiquitous cypress swamps commenting with apparent frustration "and I had to end my operation because of the waters..."

It is important to remind ourselves here that the vast lands Lafon was assessing, for the American government, for private owners, for large rural estates and the farms of small settlers, or in undeveloped acreage which he calls the "prairies" or "vacant land, none of it was actually uninhabited wasteland ready for the taking. The Mississippi Valley had been populated for at least 8,000 years before the first French explorers and settlers had arrived there in the late seventeenth century.³ Sporadically throughout the

³ The explorer René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle, was the first French to arrive in the lower Mississippi valley in 1682. His Native American friends and associates had rowed him all the way down the Big River, from the Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, in a small boat. When La Salle reached the coast, he claimed the entire "drainage system of the Mississippi" to now be the property of his King, Louis XIV, France's extravagant "Sun King." He named it after his King "*la Louisiane*" or "Louisiana" in English, meaning "the land of Louis." The "drainage system" included all the lands around the big River and the lands around all of its tributary waterways that "drain" into the Mississippi, in other words this territory covered about one third of the North American Continent. The first permanent colony near the mouth of the Mississippi was established in 1699 by two French Canadian-born brothers, Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, a mighty warrior who distinguished himself as a master in sinking British vessels, and Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, a gifted diplomat, together with about fifty hearty settlers, men and women, from Montreal in Canada, then known as "New France." Thanks to their alliance with the local "*Petites Nations*" Louisiana's numerous Indigenous First Nations, who fed and supported the fledgling French Louisiana colony, the settlement was able to survive.

surveys in these books and his maps, Lafon mentions various First Nations (*les sauvages*) of Louisiana, or rather what was left of them at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They are listed as property-owning neighbors of some of his clients or as former residents of acreage he measures. We read of the *Tchoupitoulas*, the *Houmas*, the *Attakapas* and other nations. Almost all of what is today's State of Mississippi appears as "the Land of the *Choctaws*" on Lafon's famous 1806 map of Louisiana. This map was the first precise geographical assessment of what was six years later to become the State of Louisiana in 1812. In short, as Louisiana's leading early American surveyor, Lafon played an instrumental role in the enormous American land-grabbing machine that began to explode at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The great American Westward expansion had begun. Ultimately, it would lead to fulfilling of Thomas Jefferson's vision of manifest destiny, a United States of America reaching from coast to coast. Who, then, was this famous and, at times, infamous Lafon that we find in action on the pages of three bound volumes of surveys? Who was this intrepid explorer that we reimagine, armed with his surveyor tools: his compass, his chain, and his *graphomètre*, measuring the lands, and skillfully drawing up detailed water-colored survey plans and creating legal documents (*procès verbal*), essential to the basic taxing functions of the State?

Researchers have written prolifically about Lafon's prominent contemporaries and affiliates. They include no less famous personalities than: William C.C. Claiborne, Louisiana's inexperienced and indecisive young governor, the legendary pirates, the brothers Jean and Pierre Laffite, the shrewd Micaela Almonester Baroness of Pontalba, the nationally-known lawyer and statesman Edward Livingston, and his fellow French-born, and similarly talented engineer/surveyor/architect Arsène Lacarrière Latour. But Lafon himself, it seems, has been all but forgotten and left out. In the following we open a new chapter on Lafon through an all-too-brief biographical overview. Welcome to the astounding life of this multi-talented, enormously creative, and yet controversial and ultimately tragic character.

Family Background and Early Life

Barthelemy Lafon spent his childhood still under the *Ancien Régime*, when Bourbon kings were ruling his native France and life was comfortably predictable for a privileged family like his. However, when he came of age, in 1789, the French Revolution began and brought radical political and social change to his country. As heads of French aristocrats began to roll from the guillotine, Lafon decided to flee from France altogether, never to return again.

The son of Pierre Lafon and Jeanne Roumieux, Barthelemy was born in 1769, the same year as Napoleon Bonaparte. His native small town of Villepinte in the *Département de l'Aude* was located next to the Canal-du-Midi, France's proud engineering achievement connecting the Mediterranean with the Atlantic. Just fifteen miles following the Canal downstream was the impressive medieval city of Carcassonne, today a UNESCO World Heritage site, which was then and still is now the regional capital of the *Département de l'Aude*. The larger region is called the Languedoc-Roussillon and covers most of the Southwestern corner of France. Nestled at the foot of stunning mountains, in the borderland to neighboring Spain, Lafon grew up in one of Europe's most beautiful and longest inhabited regions. He and his ancestors before him were Catholics, but the abandoned castles of former radical heretic groups, the Albigenses and Cathars, were still standing on top of the nearby mountains. They served as permanent silent reminders that resisting Catholicism and following God directly without the mediation of the Church constituted a capital crime in Pre-Revolutionary France. Under the Bourbons France was a nation state with one religion only and that was Roman Catholicism. Not being Catholic was tantamount to treason against the state and could be punished by death. No wonder Lafon was quick to insist that he was a Catholic throughout his lifetime. Both of his parents stemmed from well-educated local families. They came from the ranks of lower nobility, served frequently as governmental administrators in various positions, and had been residents of Villepinte for centuries. Barthelemy was the second child. He had an older brother named Pierre. When Barthelemy was four years old, his mother died. In terms of education, it was customary then to start home-tutoring early at preschool age. When he was seven years old he began to attend a boarding school in nearby Carcassonne. From there, he continued with advanced

education. Unfortunately, at this point of our research we don't know where he was schooled. Judging from the talents that he later displayed during his illustrious professional career, we assume that Lafon must have had the opportunity of studying at one of France's highly competitive military academies. We know that he was classically trained in Latin, Greek and Hebrew and a life-long fan of ancient Greek mythology, but he was also a tough combat fighter as well as a highly skilled engineer/architect/surveyor. That combination indicates that he may have attended a prestigious institution such as the *Prytanée* in La Fleche, or the *École Militaire* in Paris, where the curriculum included training in all those fields. We know that his talents and skills were similar to those of his later friend and collaborator, Arsène Lacarrière Latour, a native of the small town of Aurillac, France, who apprenticed with a local architect beginning in 1799 and continued his studies in architecture and engineering at the *Académie des Beaux Arts* in the French capital in 1801.⁴ Both were fond of and well-versed in classical literature and spoke several languages fluently, but yet were also ingenious engineers/architects/surveyors, a unique French educational combination, that enabled them to master both elegant civilian and sturdy military structures of almost any kind. Both had also learned the art of land surveying to the point that they were later capable of laying out entire cities. In addition, Lafon was well-versed in navigation at high sea. Hence, it is possible that he also spent some time at one of France's naval academies. Sadly, as of now, we have no information about who exactly trained him and to what extent he was self-taught. We know that he was excellent in mathematics and passionately interested in astronomy. The languages he spoke fluently include French, Spanish, English, his native Occitanian Languedoc language, and likely also Basque and Catalan. He could read at least five more including Latin, Classical Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic. This is

⁴ Latour was nine years younger than Lafon and saw his education interrupted during the years of Terror during the French Revolution, when Lafon had already left the country. His college education ended when the local college in Aurillac was closed by the Revolutionaries. Luckily, he was able to secure an apprenticeship with a local architect instead and was thus able to continue his education despite the turmoil of the war. See Jean Garrigoux, *A Visionary Adventurer Arsène Lacarrière Latour, 1778 – 1837, The Unusual Travels of a Frenchman in the Americas*, translated by Gordon S. Brown, University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2017, chaps. 1 and 2.

clearly demonstrated through the holdings of the extensive library that he left behind at the time of his death.⁵

Like most educated men of his time, he was knowledgeable in Greek and Roman mythology and he loved the theatre. It is not surprising then, talented and versatile as he was, and given that he lived during truly turbulent times of constantly shifting political allegiances, Lafon learned to write code languages as well and operated at times as a spy for foreign governments. As mentioned in the Introduction, we know that he was not alone with having a secret double-life. Leading Early American Louisiana politicians often served more than one government and tried to remain in good standing with various super-powers of their day. These, of course, included the Americans, the French, the Spanish, and the British, all of whom were rivals in the effort to take over Louisiana during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. In midst of uncertain probabilities as of who would gain the upper hand and ultimately take over their land, it is understandable that men of Louisiana's elite would cultivate secret alliances with alternative governments. Finally, Lafon was also known to have had a life-long passion for Egyptian hieroglyphics. Given his deep ties to freemasonry in later life, this obsession with ancient Egyptian mysteries is similarly not surprising.

The *Canal du Midi*, built during the reign of Louis XIV between 1666 and 1681, was the greatest water engineering achievement of its time. A hundred years later, during Lafon's childhood and youth, it remained unrivaled anywhere in Europe. Lafon grew up right next to it, playing at its banks. From Villepinte, one could take a ship either down to the Mediterranean Sea or up to Toulouse and from there continue down on the Garonne River to Bordeaux and enter the Atlantic Ocean. This canal may have inspired him early on to become an engineer while dreaming that one day, he would make it down to the Ocean and explore the world.

When Lafon was 20 years old, that day had come. The Storm of the Bastille in Paris, on July 14, 1789, unleashed the bloody French Revolution, and his family had to flee from Villepinte and the

⁵ Court of Probates, Succession of Barthelemy Lafon; Louisiana Supreme Court, Lafon, Executors v. Lafon, heirs, 1824, UNO Archives. [add exact citation]

Languedoc region. They completely vanish from the local records. While a still unknown young Napoleon Bonaparte, of exactly the same age as Lafon, rose to a spectacular leadership position within this shockingly violent revolutionary uprising, Barthélemy Lafon packed his bags and left France altogether, probably to escape persecution. We do not know why he choose to relocate to far-away Louisiana and whether he went there via Cuba or via French St. Domingue, which later in 1804, turned into Haiti, the first independent free Black Republic on earth. When he arrived in New Orleans, we assume bout 1790, the former vast French Louisiana territory had been transferred to His Catholic Majesty, the King of Spain. It remained a Spanish colony for about four decades, from the 1760s until 1803. That said, everybody in colonial Louisiana continued to speak French, and Catholicism remained mandatory for all residents. This was common in French and Spanish territories worldwide. Lafon made a smart move. Three years after his departure not only his native France, but all of Europe went up in the flames of war. The historian Jean Garrigoux, Latour's biographer, sadly comments about France during the year 1793:

...the wars had proceeded almost without interruption since 1792. In February 1793, the Convention [meaning the French revolutionary government] declared war against England, Holland, and then Spain; then most of the Italian and German states broke their relations with France. Distant, bloody, and endless wars would devour generations of young men as rapidly as they emerged from their adolescence.⁶

Meanwhile, Lafon had begun designing and building structures, repairing levees and streets, and acquiring properties in New Orleans. The threats to French citizens there were not so much foreign armies or revolutionary extremists as they were natural causes such as storms, fires, and deadly tropical diseases.

New Orleans of the 1790s, the colonial capital of Louisiana, was then a small outpost at the margins of the enormous Spanish Empire. However, this colorful and charming town, located on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, may have appealed to Lafon because it was then about the same size as his native Villepinte, and may have reminded him of the place of his childhood where everybody knew everybody else. The timing for his arrival couldn't have been more auspicious. Just two years prior to

⁶ Garrigoux, *A Visionary Adventurer*, p. 24

Lafon stepping on land in New Orleans, eighty percent of the city had been consumed by the catastrophic fire of Good Friday in 1788. It was the perfect time and place for a young man with Lafon's architectural and engineering skills to settle down and join the rebuilding efforts.

1790s Lafon—the builder during Spanish colonial New Orleans

According to architectural historian, Gilles-Antoine Langlois, Lafon worked on levee repair during his first couple of years in Louisiana, to this day a never-ending task. He was also interested in creating improvements for the city's general public. For instance, he finished a design for a "magnificent public bath in neoclassical style" (Fig. 5.2).⁷ Public bath houses existed everywhere in Europe from Scandinavia to Rome and enjoyed great popularity. In a hot and humid climate so typical for New Orleans, a public bath would have offered much needed refreshing relief. As far as we know Lafon's bath house was never constructed. Nevertheless, had it been built, it would have improved the personal hygiene of large segments of the population and might have contributed to the prevention of diseases and the physical well-being of regular patrons. Another example for Lafon's creative ideas to improve the city's public life was a proposal for a public center for the performing arts published as an advertisement in the local paper, *Le Moniteur de la Louisiane* on Sep. 4, 1802, entitled "*Salle de Spectacle - Lafon au Public*" meaning "A Theatre - Lafon appealing to the public."⁸ The language of this ad demonstrates Lafon's linguistic eloquence as well as his creative business acumen and his profound desire to make New Orleans a better, more enjoyable place for everyone. He first offers some deeply philosophical comments about the meaning of the comedy and theatre in general for the human soul and the considerable contributions the performing arts would make to society. Ancient Rome, he insists, collected a tax in order to support their theatres. In the same manner he argues, New Orleans, needs a public theatre:

⁷ Gilles-Antoine Langlois, *Des Villes pour la Louisiane Française*. Paris, 2003, p. 387.

⁸ "Salle de spectacles" could also be translated as "performance space" or today we would call it a "center for the performing arts." See *Le Moniteur de la Louisiane*, Sep. 4, 1802, p. 1.

Let us erect a theatre in the center of the city, surrounded by various buildings that will serve to accommodate the actors and the director. There would also be cafes, concert halls, etc. etc. On the ground floor would be halls for public balls; in one word, one could assemble there the useful together with the pleasurable...⁹

Lafon envisions a multi-purpose facility, where visiting actors and directors would be housed and businesses such as coffee houses, bars, restaurants, concert halls and billiard halls would have their place, so that people could mingle and be merry while nourishing their minds with entertainment and their bodies with food and drink, in short, a brilliant modern idea. Lafon, the promoter, breaks down in detail what the cost for such a building project would be. After all, he is a professional builder. He then discusses and how to finance it. “The funding will be gathered through subscription. This subscription will consist of 90 shares. Every share in the rows of the first loge will be available for 500 dollars [*piastres*]. Every share in the second and third loge will be at the 450 dollar level...”¹⁰ Subscriptions with the old theatre, he suggests, could be rolled over into the new theatre space. Furthermore, he offers a long list of additional ideas for various forms of fund-raising activities.

In December 1794, another big fire devastated New Orleans. The catastrophic fire six years earlier, on Good Friday of 1788, had destroyed nearly all of the public buildings including St. Louis Church and about 860 houses. By 1794, the city had not yet recovered from the first inferno when an additional 200 structures went up in flames – many of them elegant homes and government buildings located along Levee (Decatur) and Chartres Streets between Bienville and Jackson Square. Lafon moved quickly and decisively into this window of opportunity. The following years between 1794 and 1810 mark a period of enormous architectural productivity and much success in Lafon’s professional life.

He landed the majority of his domestic architecture commissions in the mid to late 1790s. Examples of his work during this period include the Macarty house at the corner of Conti and Decatur

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Streets, designed in 1794, a home for Jean Baptiste Rivière on the corner of Bienville and Decatur Streets, and possibly the Cornue-Pitot House, built in 1795 at old 9 Royal Street, which is often attributed to him. He designed the Bosque House at 617 Chartres and the Joseph Reynes House on the corner of Chartres and Toulouse Streets. Sam Wilson and others have credited Lafon to have designed the “first skyscraper building” of New Orleans, the Pedesclaux-Le Monnier House at 636-42 Royal Street. It was built ca. 1795. Lafon may not have been able to see the construction of this building to a finish, due to a lawsuit. The house was expanded upward in 1811 by Latour and Laclotte. In 1798, Lafon designed the Samuel Moore House, which later became the Orleans Hotel on Chartres and Toulouse Streets. Langlois credits Lafon with the design of the Bank of the United States at 339 Royal Street, now Waldhorn’s Antiques. The home of Vincent Rillieux at the corner of Royal and Conti Street, where Lafon had an office space on the ground level, is also attributed to him (see summary of Lafon’s architectural career, following Chapter 5).

The City Council of New Orleans commissioned Lafon to conduct a number of engineering and architectural jobs in the 1790s. For instance, he was asked to repair the city jail in 1794 and 1795, and had a two-year contract to repair and build street gutters to improve drainage in the city from 1797 to 1799. In 1798, the City Council hired him to construct a new tile-roofed, wood-framed fish market designed by the architect Gilberto Guillemard. Lafon was also chosen to appraise work on the Presbytere building also conducted by Guillemard.

In terms of his social life, Lafon found new friends during these years not only among fellow builders and new homeowners that he had assisted with construction work. He was a staunch Catholic and was likely to forge friendships and alliances at Church. St. Louis Church became a Cathedral, the seat of a Roman Catholic diocese in 1793, when the Most Reverend Doctor Luis Ignacio Maria de Peñalver y Cardenas was appointed the first bishop of Louisiana, but he did not arrive there until July 17, 1795. More closely to Lafon’s heart, the new parish priest and rector serving the local congregation of St. Louis Cathedral, Friar Antonio de Sedella, a Capuchin monk from the Province of Malaga in the South of Spain, who also arrived in 1793. Friar Sedella soon became not only his spiritual advisor, but also his

personal friend and associate for the rest of his life. It appears all of New Orleans fell in love with him. They nick-named him Père Antoine and he would become the city's most beloved priest of all times.

As New Orleans and Spanish Louisiana was far away from the Pope in Rome, the people of New Orleans felt safe to embrace new social ideas that clearly contradicted the ordinances of the Vatican. The founding fathers of the new American republic, the United States of America, that had declared its independence from the British crown in 1776, were altogether members of Masonic lodges. The spirit of freemasonry also influenced substantially the French and the Haitian Revolutions during the 1790s. During that same decade, freemasonry arrived as well in New Orleans and Barthelemy Lafon was one of the founding members. He is recorded as a charter member of the Perfect Union Lodge established in 1794, the first Free Masonic Society in Louisiana.¹¹ Its parent lodge had been established in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the capital of the United States at the time. The founding of the local New Orleans chapter may have required Lafon to travel to Pennsylvania.

1798-1820 Lafon—the businessman and Real Estate Investor

By the late 1790s, Lafon began to turn to real estate investments and land speculation. Governor Gayoso granted him a tract of land immediately above the city in 1798 for the purpose of establishing a foundry, located today near the foot of Canal Street (Fig. 4.2). A similar concession had been given in 1743 under French colonial rule when Governor Vaudreuil granted the tract immediately below the city to contractor Claude Joseph Villars Dubreuil for the purpose of running a sawmill. This arrangement proved to be fruitful, as many of the city's original buildings had been constructed with materials processed at Dubreuil's mill. However, such success did not follow the Lafon grant of 1798. The foundry was never truly functional on a large scale. Nevertheless, Lafon retained possession of this valuable strip of land for a number of years.

¹¹ (*Tableaus* of the Perfect Union Lodge)

In 1801, Lafon purchased the 34,000-acre St. Maxent plantation near Chef Menteur and named it *L'heureuse folie*, or Happy Folly, which he was able to keep until his death. This plantation would later become a major military base for the American Militia that defended the city against the British under Andrew Jackson.

In 1804, Lafon purchased from the estate of the late Julie Brion, a wealthy free woman of color, a lot and house located at what would be now 934-36 St. Louis Street located in square 70 of the French Quarter, bounded by St. Louis, Conti, Burgundy and Dauphine Streets. This same Julie Brion was his “mother-in-law” of sorts, meaning the mother of his long-term life partner, Modeste Foucher, who was pregnant with their first child at the time. The cottage at this location became the couple’s main residence. He later subdivided the property, but kept the house, in which he eventually died (Fig. 5.1).

1803 – 1819 Lafon—the land surveyor and cartographer

At the beginning of the 19th Century, by the time of the Louisiana Purchase, Lafon’s main professional interests were shifting from architecture to engineering and surveying. Lafon began to advertise himself locally as “*ingénieur géographe*” (“engineer/geographer”). His early commissions in this capacity include an 1803 survey of Galveston (now Galvez, LA near Baton Rouge) for the Spanish, and surveying and mapping New Orleans.

In 1804, Lafon was appointed “deputy surveyor for the Territory of Orleans, duly commissioned by Isaac T. Briggs, surveyor general of the lands South of Tennessee” immediately following the Louisiana Purchase. In this capacity, Lafon conducted an incredible number of surveys in New Orleans and around the city, as well as throughout the Territory of Orleans, which turned eventually by 1812 into the State of Louisiana. His rather numerous surveys were later compiled (most likely after his death) and bound into the three large volumes of surveys mentioned above. They became the property of the Masonic Grand Lodge of Louisiana. The Grand Lodge had been established in New Orleans in 1812, the year when Louisiana gained statehood. At some point after 1820, Lafon’s local Perfect Union Lodge turned his materials over to the Grand Lodge. At some point, parts of the archival collection of the Grand

Lodge disappeared. There were items that were either accidentally thrown away or sold off. These latter included Lafon's *Survey Books Nos. 1 and 2*. The Historic New Orleans Collection eventually acquired these two volumes and was thus able to save them for posterity. Volume No. 3 remained to this day in the holdings of the Grand Masonic Lodge, which is now relocated to Alexandria, Louisiana. Together, these three volumes display the amazing surveying legacy which Lafon bequeathed to future generations.

In 1806, Lafon completed the large map titled “Carte Générale du Territoire d’Orléans Comprenant aussi la Floride Occidentale et une Portion du Territoire de Mississippi,” which was commissioned by the New Orleans City Council. This map became his most famous cartographic achievement and constitutes what Lafon is best known for until today (Fig. 4.4).

Lafon's Personal Life and Family

By the time of the Louisiana Purchase, Lafon had found the love of his life when he met Modeste Foucher, a beautiful and intelligent woman of means. The two had a committed relationship until his death parted them in 1820. They may have met at church through Père Antoine, whom both loved dearly, or in connection with the Perfect Union Lodge, where many of her immediate family had found their “spouses”/life partners. If given the chance, they would have formerly legalized their liaison. As good Catholics they would have married for the sake of their five children alone. But the racially oppressive legal system of Louisiana did not provide them with any possibility of formally acknowledging their relationship. The two maintained a common household, engaged in frequent business collaborations, and co-raised their children. The problem was Modeste Foucher was not legally white. She looked white according to reports of contemporaries, but she was one quarter black, a free quadroon, and because of that not able to legally marry a white Frenchman such as Lafon. She was the child of the free woman of color, Julie Brion, who appears on documents classified as a free *mulatresse* (meaning she was half black and half white) and Joseph Foucher, a member of the white French Creole planters' elite and a distinguished officer of the Spanish Army. Brion was the child of her former owner, René Brion, whose

white wife Marianne Piquéry had freed her together with her children gratuitously in 1776.¹² By then Julie Brion had two children from a previous relationship, Benedicte and Achille Burel, whose black father had passed away, and a one-year old infant, the natural daughter of Joseph Foucher named Modeste Foucher, who by the time of the Louisiana Purchase, 27 years later, was Barthelemy Lafon's life partner. Joseph Foucher and Julie Brion moved together as soon as she was freed. She gave birth to their first son, Joseph Foucher *fmc.*, in the same year. As a mixed-race child he had to use the suffix *fmc.* behind his name, an abbreviation of "free man of color," whenever his name appeared in an official document and was not allowed to call himself Joseph Foucher, Jr., which he could do today and would have been able to do had he been legally white. Foucher and Brion shared a committed domestic partnership until his death in 1792. Before he passed away, they had three more children: Julie, Josephine, and René Bienvenu Foucher, who was only 1 year old at the time of their father's death. Together they had acquired property in New Orleans that Julie Brion managed to retain after his passing until she, too, found an untimely death in 1804, at the age of forty. Modeste's four younger siblings were still minors when their mother passed away. Their wealthy and influential white uncle Pierre Foucher, Joseph Foucher's younger brother, became initially their legal guardian. Later on, Modeste and Barthelemy took the youngest, René Bienvenu, into their care and Lafon became his legal guardian. Lafon also purchased two pieces of property in the French Quarter from the estate of the late Julie Brion. One was the above-mentioned house on the corner of St. Louis and Burgundy Streets, which served as their main residence. The other was located on Chartres Street between Conti and St. Louis Streets. Both properties appear in *Survey Book No. 3* in official survey operations he undertook.¹³

¹² For further information on Lafon's mixed-race family see Ina Fandrich, "Thomy Lafon--A research report for the Odyssey House Louisiana" an unpublished biographical study commissioned by the Odyssey House New Orleans and submitted to the Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Family, copyrighted in 2008; and Ina Fandrich "Thomy Lafon (1810-1893): Remembering the Legendary Creole Philanthropist on His 200th Birthday" in *LA Creole – Journal of the Louisiana Creole Research Association*, Vol. 3, 2010.

¹³ Barthelemy Lafon, *Survey Book No. 3* (Vol I, pp. 52-53, including pp. 52.1 and 52.2).

All of these purchases from Brion's estate attest to the fact that Lafon took this relationship with Modeste Foucher as seriously as any man possibly could have. Barthelemy and Modeste had five children. Their first-born, Julie, named for her grandmother Julie Brion, died before she was one year old in 1804; the second, Pierre Barthelemy, named for his grandfather Pierre Lafon, was born in 1806, the third, Carmelite in 1808, and the last two, Thomy in 1810 and Alpee in 1812. The priest at St. Louis Cathedral, Friar Antonio de Sedella, collaborated with Lafon so that all of his children were baptized as white persons under code identities and not with their real names. They had later the choice of either staying in New Orleans as black Lafon descendants or leaving the city and passing for white somewhere else. If they decided to do so they could escape the increasing oppression and discrimination they would suffer in Louisiana as people of color, or move away and have a promising future as privileged white citizens under their fictive baptismal names. The older two opted for becoming white, the younger two remained black in New Orleans. All four of them turned out to be financial geniuses blessed with remarkable longevity and acquired substantial wealth on their own merits in future years.¹⁴

1806-1810, Lafon's Political Aspirations

The year 1806 was an extremely prolific period for Lafon. Besides being incredibly productive in his professional life as the "surveyor of the Territory of Orleans South of Tennessee," somehow, he also managed in his free time to engage actively in the city's social, cultural, and political life. Early in the year, he was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the Second Regiment of the newly established American Louisiana Militia, and soon rose to the rank of Captain. He laid out the streets of the Faubourg Marigny according to the plan made by Nicolas de Finiels the year before, drew a plan for the subdivision of the Delord-Sarpy plantation, and laid out the town of Donaldsonville as well. Lafon also entered politics that year when he ran for a seat in the territorial House of Representatives. His pitch for this post

¹⁴ See *ibid*, Note 3.

remained unsuccessful, probably because he was overcommitted professionally and simply didn't have as much time to dedicate to his campaign as his competitors had.

Lafon also completed several notable domestic architecture projects in 1806. His style is evident in the Isnard House at 409 Bourbon Street, and he designed the Zeringue House on Bayou St. Jean Road. 1806 was also the year that he designed a house for his plantation below the city and hired contractors for its construction. Lafon purchased a number of enslaved workers at this time, a practice he continued for years.

In 1807, Lafon compiled the *Calendrier de commerce de la Nouvelle-Orléans* to aid the city's economy. He purchased land in Plaquemines Parish, and worked on the city's fortifications with Arsène Lacarrière Latour. That same year, the city accepted Lafon's plan for a meat market located near the arsenal, and Lafon designed the Goodwin house and store at present 508-510 Chartres. He was elected to the New Orleans city council in 1808 and served one two-year term. He also compiled the first city directory *L'Annuaire Louisianais pour l'année 1809*. He also laid out the Faubourg St. John, drew a plan for the subdivision of the Saulet plantation, and purchased land in Opelousas during this period.

1812-1815 Lafon's Military Service during the War of 1812 and the Battle of New Orleans

Nine years after the Louisiana Purchase, the Territory of Orleans was finally recognized by Congress and became officially the State of Louisiana in 1812. Unfortunately, in the same year, the United States entered into a war with Great Britain, the War of 1812. The city of New Orleans played a pivotal role in this conflict that would change world history for centuries to come.

British war vessels kept assaulting American merchant ships at sea and forcibly pressing their sailors into the British Navy. Enraged over these injustices, the American government declared war on Great Britain in 1812. At the beginning of the conflict, England was preoccupied with fighting against Napoleon and his French troops. Once he was defeated and sent into Exile, the British took care of the Americans. In August of 1814, the British army arrived in Washington and burnt the American capital to

the ground. New Orleans was to be next. A fleet was dispatched to the Gulf of Mexico to take over the Gulf Coast and pillage the city. The British knew that whoever takes New Orleans automatically controls the inner-American waterways and would ultimately have control over America. The British were told that they were sure to win, but they didn't count on Andrew Jackson and the Baratarian Privateers, who proved to be formidable opponents. The result would be one of Great Britain's worst defeats in history.

As soon as the threat developed, Lafon was promoted to the rank of Major and became Chief Engineer of the Seventh Military District of the United States. As such he went immediately to work to develop detailed maps and drawings of all the forts in the region and provided recommendations for essential repairs and enforcements that he deemed necessary to the American president and the Secretary of Defense, but nothing happened.

At the time of the Louisiana Purchase, New Orleans had the largest Pirate syndicate of North America. Their headquarters was on Grand Terre in the Baratarian swamplands, to the south of the city. They called themselves the Baratarian Privateers and operated under the leadership of the brothers Jean and Pierre Laffite. There may have been as many as a thousand of these Baratarians, with several dozen armed ships in their possession. Their numbers included mainly smugglers who secreted the resulting booty through narrow winding waterways into the city. Their booty was desperately needed in the city, and they sold it at reasonable prices. Nearly every businessperson of New Orleans was in cahoots with them in one way or another. For years Lafon had been a close affiliate of the Laffite brothers. They may have met as young men in Bordeaux before crossing the Atlantic Ocean, or they may have collaborated during the time of Haitian Revolution and Independence War, shuttling French refugees from the bloody war zone into safety in the eastern United States. During these rescue missions they may have also have forged a friendship with the French engineer Arsène Lacarrière Latour, who also had arrived in Haiti toward the end of the War, serving as the chief military engineer under General Leclerc, before Leclerc died and the remnants of his army were expelled from Haiti. Eventually, the Laffite brothers, Lafon, and Latour -- all four joined together in New Orleans and worked closely during the years preceding the War of 1812.

In 1814, Lafon participated in an operation which led to the capturing of two Spanish vessels. The American officials of New Orleans had finally enough of the pirates. They retaliated. In September of 1814, U.S. naval officers led by Commodore Patterson launched a surprise attack on Grand Terre and raided the Baratarian stronghold. The American forces were able to capture a large number of Baratarians. Pierre Laffite and Barthelemy Lafon were among them and became their star prisoners. They were jailed in New Orleans and charged with piracy in the taking of the Spanish vessels. Three months later, on December 1, 1814, General Andrew Jackson arrived in town to defend the city from the invading British force. Jackson realized quickly that he could not win this war without the support of the Baratarians. They were the only ones in town, who were in possession of heavy artillery and had plenty experience with using it. Jackson and Jean Laffite arranged a secret meeting and cut a deal. The Baratarians would support Jackson's efforts in defending the city and in return they would all be pardoned and released from prison. Their ships and warehouse holdings that had been seized would be returned. Lafon was released and immediately joined the defense of the city. He still held the rank of Major, but was no longer the Chief Engineer. That post had been bestowed upon Latour, whose reputation had not been affected by the raid of Barataria because by some fortunate fluke of fate he was not there on the day of the raid. Together, Latour and Lafon worked feverishly to support Jackson's efforts to strengthen the forts, drawing up strategic plans and building the defense breastwork behind the Rodrigue Canal at the Chalmette battlefield.

On January 8, 1815, the culminating Battle of New Orleans that decided the outcome of the war and the fate of the Louisiana Purchase, arrived. Pakenham commanded about 9,600 assault troops, who would contest Andrew Jackson's 5,200 defenders. Many of the British troops had experience in the peninsula campaign against Napoleon. The vast majority of Jackson's army had never seen a battle, and many had no weapons. To everybody's surprise, the Americans were able to defeat the British in an amazing victory. The British suffered such horrific casualties that they waved the white flag and asked for a cease-fire. Within less than half an hour they had lost their three major generals including Pakenham himself as well as two thousand and thirty-three soldiers. Jackson had at the same time less than twenty

casualties. The pirate artillerymen were not playing around. One American naval thirty-two pounder took down as many as thirty-five British soldiers with a single shot of mini-balls. One should think, that out of gratitude for their patriotism, the citizens of New Orleans and the American authorities would be grateful to their saviors, the mighty Baratarians, who had saved the city and the entire country for that matter, with their brave and highly effective artillery action. Yet, that was not the case. When it was all over with and the British were gone, Jackson didn't keep his word. The Baratarians did not get their vessels and materials back that had been confiscated during the raid on Grand Terre, as promised. They remained under constant suspicion and attacks and were eventually forced out of town altogether. The Laffites left for good, Lafon joined them in their exile in Texas for some time, but came back to re-establish himself professionally and to be with his black family. Unfortunately, to no avail. All of them would remain social outcasts until the end of their lives.

1815-1820 Lafon's Final Years as Privateer and Spy for the Spanish Government

Lafon returned briefly to professional life after the war, but his troubles mounted. In February of 1815 the recently installed New Orleans District Attorney, John Dick, re-indicted Lafon, with Dominique You and others, for piracy, and he spent again some time in jail before he was finally acquitted.

During this period Lafon purchased land in Donaldsonville. He created a detailed map of New Orleans and its environs, which showcased his fusion of the Delord-Sarpy and Annunciation subdivisions into what is now known as the Lower Garden District. By 1816, however, Lafon was in financial ruin and near bankruptcy. He advertised his services as architect and builder in the *Louisiana Courier* in October of 1816, apparently without much success. Despite all of his experience and ingenious skills, he was unable to find work. Ever since he was caught in Grand Terre in the fall of 1814, his reputation had been tarnished indelibly and permanently. He decided that working with the Laffites as a corsair was the only survival option left open to him.

In 1816, persistent persecution forced the Laffites to vacate Barataria. They moved westwards to Texas and established themselves on the island of Galveston. Here, a colony of Mexican patriots

collaborated with Laffite's men to raid Spanish ships under the Mexican flag, and Lafon was involved in this operation. After delivering munitions to Galveston, Lafon's ship, *La Carmelita*, was captured on the high seas by representatives of Galveston's "government."

Astonishingly, while the Laffites and their men were living in Mexican territory, operating under the Mexican flag, and raiding Spanish ships, they were also working as spies for the Spanish government *against* pro-Independence Mexican constituencies. Lafon was also part of this arrangement. He drew the map "Entrada de la Bahia de Galveston" for the Spanish government and surveyed other areas of the southwest as well. Lafon became an official Spanish spying agent in 1817. Like his friend and fellow collaborator in Texas, Arsène Lacarrière Latour, Lafon, may have been working for the Americans simultaneously as a double agent. In the following year, he had enough of his adventures in Texas and returned to Louisiana.

Death and Inheritance Battle

In 1818, Lafon was back in New Orleans. Disillusioned with his professional prospects in America, he tried to sell everything he owned and had plans to return to his native France. Maybe he also wanted to see his father and brother again, who were still alive. Obviously, he was tired of struggling professionally, tired of privateering, and fed-up with an increasingly racialized social system that did not accept his life partner and children as fully human. He yearned for radical change in this life. In his native France, a new republic had been established where racial differentiation among people didn't exist, at least not as a state-sanctioned practice. From all we know, he wanted to take his family with him, so that he and Modeste could get married and would be able to legitimize their four children. In France, all members of his mixed-race family would simply be French citizens regardless of their racial background. Nevertheless, to give up everything and restart somewhere else all over again must have been a scary thought for a man over 50, but Lafon was daring and willing to give it at least a shot. Unfortunately, before he could do so, he suddenly fell seriously ill and succumbed to yellow fever on September 29, 1820, at the age of 51. The obituary reads as follows:

Died this A.M. after a short illness, Mr. Barthelemy Lafon, engineer, geographer, and architect, established for a long time in this city. Mr. Lafon takes with him the regrets of many honest men and will be long regretted by all who can appreciate his talents and the good qualities of his heart.¹⁵

He was buried on the same day in St. Louis Cemetery No. 1. The burial record filed in the Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans was recorded in Spanish by his friend Père Antoine, the long-term Rector at St. Louis Cathedral:

LAFON, Bartholome (Pedro and Juana ROUMIEUX), native of Pexiora, dept. of L[*] [département de l'Aude], engineer, geographer, and architect in this capital, 51 yr., interred Sep. 29, 1820.¹⁶

After the funeral, a prolonged battle for his inheritance ensued. Lafon's mixed-race family, Modeste Foucher, his life partner, and their four surviving children, Edouard, Cecile, Thomy, and Alphée, had no say in the matter. Since they were not white, regardless how they actually looked, they were ineligible to inherit a penny of his estate. They struggled for years after his death and suffered considerable financial hardship. All his debtors came out of the woodwork from near and far and demanded what was theirs. The man he owed the most was the real estate investor Jean Gravier, who became one of the two executors of his testament because of Lafon's extensive indebtedness to him. In addition, Lafon had surviving blood relatives in France, who were convinced that they alone were the righteous heirs of his estate.

According to the then prevailing laws, Barthelemy's surviving white French father, Pierre Lafon, Sr., was to become the main beneficiary. We don't know how his father found out about his son's passing. It could have been Modeste, who had notified the family. Or, more likely, it fell upon the official executors of his testament to do so, Jean Gravier, to whom Lafon was considerably indebted, and Jean Poumairat, his personal lawyer. If it was indeed them, they may have done so out of courtesy, not expecting that the elderly father, who was in his mid-eighties at the time, would actually decide to come

¹⁵ *Le Moniteur*, Sep. 29, 1820

¹⁶ Pexiora is a part of Villepinte, located on the other side of the Canal du Midi and is essentially the same place. Lafon usually mentioned Villepinte as his birthplace. See *Archdiocese of New Orleans Sacramental Records*, Vol. 14 (1820-1821), p. 229 (SLC, F13, 16)

to New Orleans and sue them. Enticed by the presumed fabulous riches that he must have hoped to claim, Pierre Lafon, Sr., made the long journey by ship across the Atlantic Ocean, despite of his advanced age and failing health. He arrived in New Orleans in 1822. His expectation to inherit a fortune did not come out of the blue. Barthelemy Lafon's estate was substantial. The obligatory post-humous inventory of his property filed with the Court of Probates included large amounts of real estate, over 50 enslaved field hands and domestic servants, and a library of over 500 books.¹⁷ However, unbeknownst to his French relatives, the great *ingénieur-géographe*/alias privateer was in deep financial troubles at the time of his sudden death and his business had been faltering for years. Then, tragedy struck again. Pierre Lafon, Sr., met the same fate as his son shortly after his arrival in Louisiana. He, too, succumbed to yellow fever.¹⁸ But, his French family was still determined to cash in on their presumed inheritance. Before long, Pierre Lafon, Jr., Barthelemy's seven-years-old brother, who was next in line for the inheritance, made it to Louisiana from far-away France together with his wife Jeanne Victoire. Yet, the family tragedy seemed to have no end. Jeanne Victoire, Barthelemy's 54 years old sister-in-law, too, died of yellow fever within days after their arrival. She was interred on September 14, 1822 in St. Louis Cemetery No. 1.¹⁹ Her husband, Barthelemy's older brother, caught the deadly fever in the following month and was laid to rest on October 19th, 1822.²⁰ He was 60 years old. Finally, not deterred by lurking deadly diseases in hot and steamy New Orleans, their feisty daughter, Jeanne Philippe Lafon, Barthelemy's niece and lone surviving member of his immediate white French family, took the long watery journey to the Crescent City. She seems to have had a strong physical disposition or was just lucky not to catch the horrendous fever that

¹⁷ See inventory filed in "Jeanne Phillippe Lafon, Executrix & Hairs of the Late J. P. Lafon vs. J. Gravier & J. Poumairat, Executors of B. Lafon," Louisiana Supreme Court No. 822, filed April 7, 1923, Special Collections, University of New Orleans.

¹⁸ We know that he was already deceased when his son, Pierre Lafon, Jr., arrived in New Orleans in the same year. See *Archdiocese of New Orleans Sacramental Records*, Vol. 15 (1822-1823), p. 221-222.

¹⁹ See *Archdiocese of New Orleans Sacramental Records*, Vol. 15 (1822-1823), p. 221 "LAFON, Jeanne Victoire (Santiago and Jeanne GUE[*]DON, native of Villeport, dept. of [Lode?] [Villepinte, dept. of Aude?] in France, sp. Pierre LAFOND, 54 yr., i. Sep. 14, 1822, d. [o] (SLC, F13, 67)."

²⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 221-222 "LAFON, Pierre (Pierre, dec. and Jeanne ROUMIEU [X?], dec.) native of Villepinte, dept. of Aude, arrondissement communal of Castebroudorrry [Villepinte, arrondissement of Carcassonne, canton of Castelnaudary-sud, dept. of Aude], 60 yr., i. Oct. 19, 1822, d. [o] (SLC, F13, 76)."

had wiped out her entire Lafon family. Thus, she was able to continue the battle for their presumed family inheritance and took it all the way to the Louisiana Supreme Court.²¹ She pursued the matter for more than a decade. In the end, she won, but only to find out that the succession of her uncle, Barthelemy Lafon, “was wholly insolvent and unable to pay the legacies and debts.”²²

²¹ Louisiana Supreme Court, UNO Archives.

²² See Harriet Bos, “Barthelemy Lafon,” p. 121.

CHAPTER 3.

CONQUESTS ON PAPER:

A Short History of the Cartography of Colonial North America and Louisiana

Gabriele Richardson

Before diving in into the changes of cartography between the sixteenth and nineteenth century with a focus on America, a short overview about the instruments explorers used to measure distance, elevation, and to verify locations before drawing their findings on a map is necessary.

Between the 1600s and the 1800s, the primary measurement tool was the *Gunter's chain*. Edmund Gunter's chain from 1620 measured 4 poles in length (66 feet) or 100 links, each link joins the next link by three rings and equals a length of 7.92 inches each; ten square chains for instance equal an acre (Gunter, 1620). In addition, surveyors used the *King's Surveying Quadrant* (quarter of a circle) (*Fig. 1*) to measure heights, depressions, and distances of flat and hilly grounds, and circumferentors (a large compass, divided into 360 degrees) to define their direction and horizontal angles and to measure political and property boundaries and settlements by determining the bearings of boundary lines. They also used theodolites (largely replacing the circumferentors) with or without a telescope, with an inbuilt 360 degrees compass to read the horizontal and vertical angles and way-wiser and pedometer for measuring toads or distance travelled.

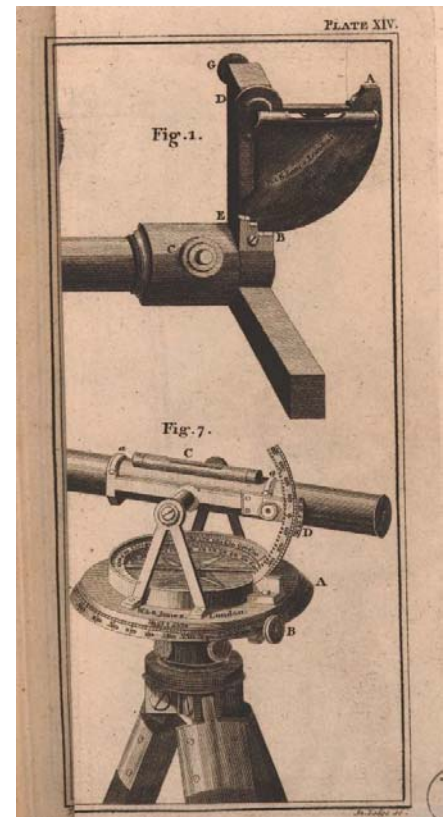


Fig. 1. King's surveying quadrant with sights above and portable theodolite below (Adams et al., 1791).

Geometry, trigonometry and each above mentioned instrument and more are described in great detail in surveyor handbooks to teach how to use these instruments and plot with greater accuracy land and coast lines (Love, 1731, Adams, 1791).

Similarities occur in maritime survey handbooks, introducing meridians, longitudes, and latitudes, combined with instruments mentioned above (Fig. 2) to measure shorelines, shoals, and harbors, and to direct ship courses from land to land. In addition, extensive explanations about how to convert a foot (e.g. English, Paris, and Danish foot) to inches, geometrical miles in a degree of longitude, or how to measure distance using the flash and report of a gun (McKenzie and Horsburgh, 1819).

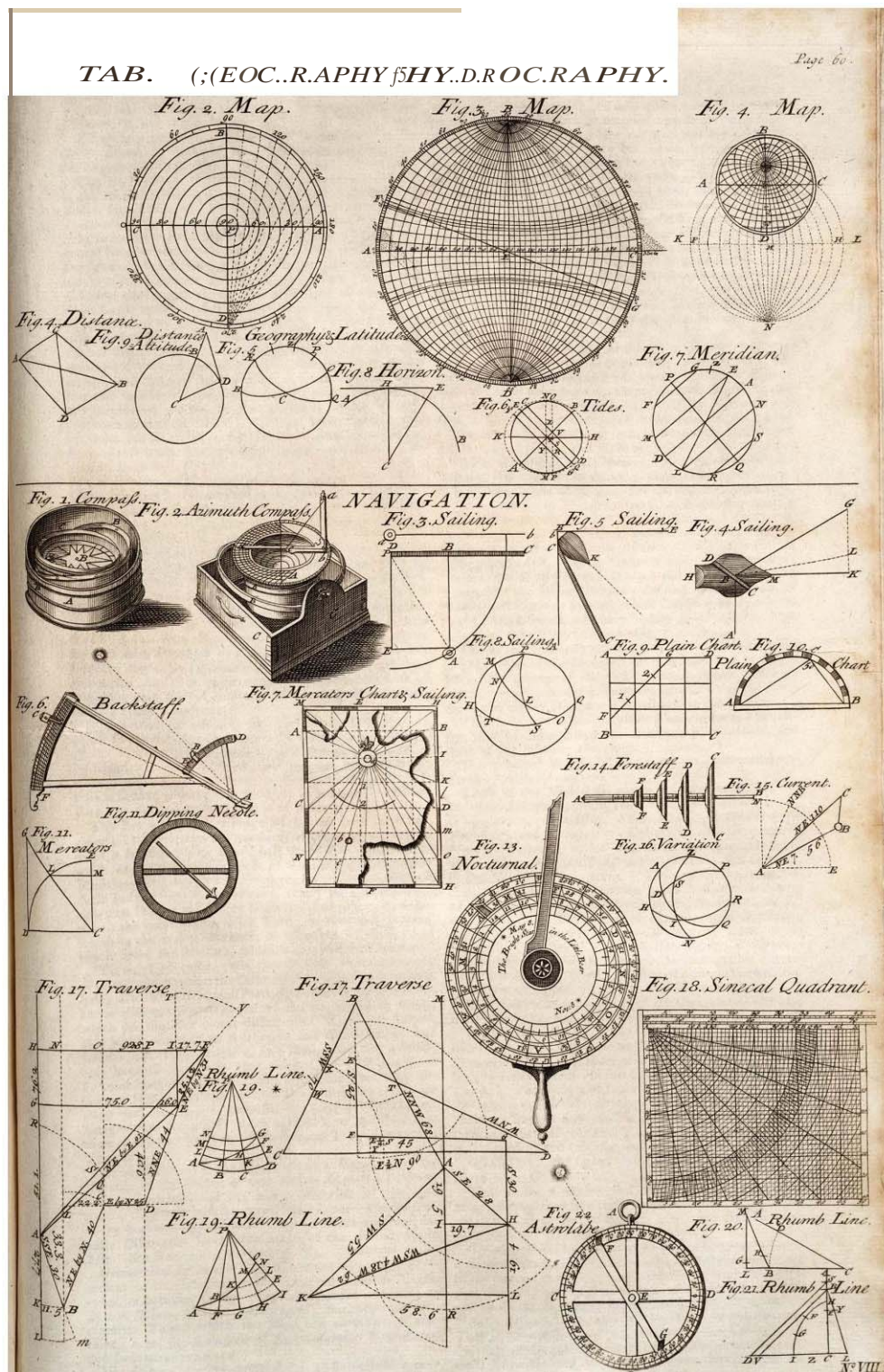


Fig. 2. Geography, Hydrography, and Navigation instruments and measurement examples on how to use these tools (Chambers, 1728).

During the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, seamen were still not able to measure exactly the longitude, and even latitudes could be found only relatively accurate. In 1760s, John Harrison invented the seagoing chronometer or marine timekeeper to determine longitude at sea with a portable clock which kept time to within three seconds a day (Royal Museums Greenwich, 2019). After 1822, when William Austin Burt became United States Deputy Surveyor, he invented a new compass using the sun (solar compass) to avoid the inaccuracy of the magnetic compass, which was especially influenced by soil containing a high iron concentration, and to determine latitude and the true north direction. Burt's invention was so important that within a few years the law for land survey required the use of a solar compass until the creation of the modern day Global Position System (Detroit Historical Society, 2019).

Despite having all the instruments, after 1785 surveyors in the United States had to deal with a method of measurement named the *Land Ordinance of 1785*. This law required that new land had to be divided into townships and sections so settlers could purchase titles to farmland. The final ordinance passed in May 1785 described a township as six miles square, containing 36 sections of one mile square, numbered from south to north, and the ranges from east to west (*Fig. 3*). The following years some rules of how to divide or subdivide sections were added (Higgins, 1887). Nevertheless, despite the law, Louisiana kept the French arpent land grants or sections along the Mississippi River and other major waterways, which started with the first French settlers in the early eighteenth century when purchasing land.

LANUS

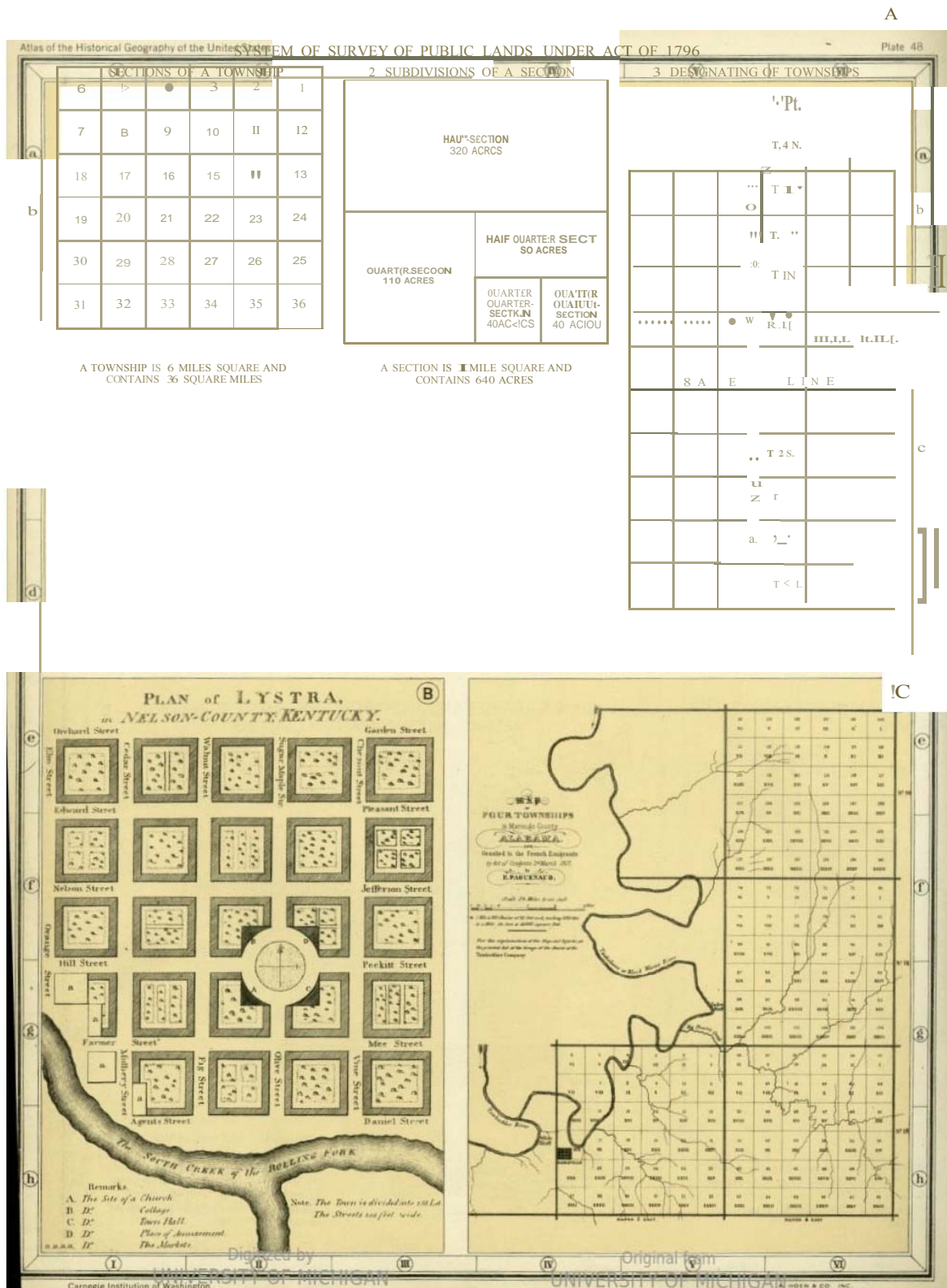


Fig.3. Illustration of public lands survey under the Act of 1796 with township, sections, subdivisions, and maps how to use it in areas closed to a river (Paullin et al.,1932).

Despite surveying laws and the availability of better cartographic and nautical instruments, the following chapter will demonstrate that over time the many maps and plans have intentional cartographic inaccuracies because they were created more for political reasons than for accuracy.

Maps and mapmaking influenced the development of colonial North America. Covering the time from the earliest European settlement of North America to the middle of the nineteenth century, the chapter will illustrate how cartography evolved from historical causes and will look at territorial boundaries belonging to Spain, Netherlands, England, and France, in addition to examining the symbols, legends, and cartographic fallacies, accidental and intentional, by mapmakers and/or geographers.

The most important historical map was from the Flemish mapmaker Gerardus Mercator's *World Map 1569* (Fig. 4). With his projection he could show a three dimensional globe on a two dimensional flat surface by simply wrapping a paper cylinder around the globe, projecting the globe and unwrapping it. He kept the longitudes as parallel meridian lines and parallel latitude lines by intersecting the longitude lines, but farther away from the Equator towards the poles the space between lines became wider, which distorted landmasses near the poles (landmasses and oceans near the poles look much larger than they actually are). Despite these distortions, Mercator's map projection follows closely the compass reading and therefore his maps were widely used in the following centuries until present day by sailors for nautical navigation (Manning, 2018). In addition, it was the first time the term *Atlas* for cartographic work appeared. This name was in Mercator's published work of multiple maps, including tables with

numerous named areas and cities and their locations on the globe (Mercator and Mercator, 1595).

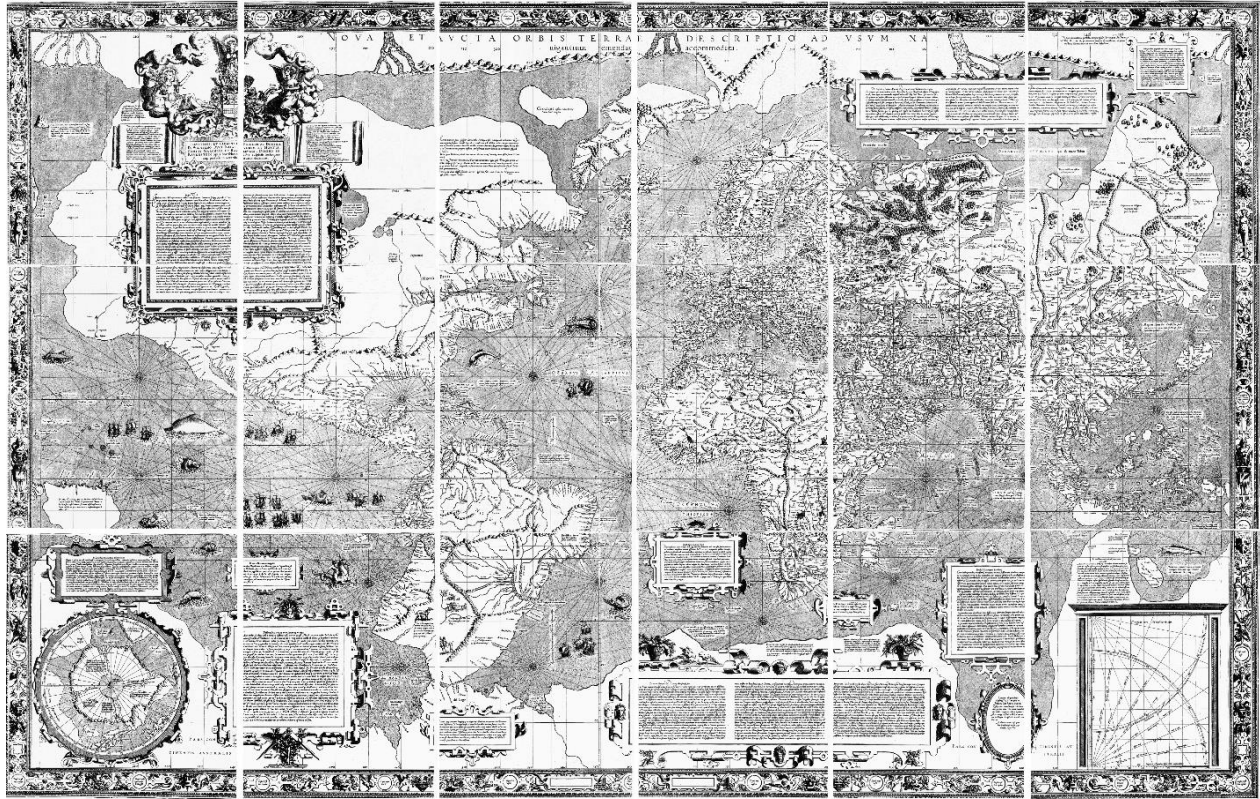


Fig. 4. Mercator's world map composite, titled *Nova et Aucta Orbis Terrae Descriptio ad Usum Navigantium Emendate Accommodata* (Mercator, 1569).

Turning to North American maps, one of the first, based on the work of *Gerónimo de Chaves*, a Spanish Crown cartographer, is “La Florida,” published in the 1584 Latin edition of Abraham Ortelius’ *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*. The relief appears pictorially and the names and locations of indigenous settlements (Chavez, 1584) probably based on the Hernando de Sotó’s exploration of the southeastern quadrant of North America from Florida to the Mississippi River (Bowman, 2017). Cartographer *Corneille Wytfliet* used Chaves’ shape of Florida in his 1597

published “Florida et Apalche” map, including Chaves’ indigenous settlements. However, both cartographers’ omission of longitude and latitude information cause inaccuracies and the maps give a poor overall sense of the area (seems Florida covers the entire present United States). Worth mentioning, comparing dimension and position, is that the displayed river “R. de S. Spirito” on *Wytfliet*’s map must be the present Mississippi River (Osborn, 2015).

French geographer and founder of the French school of cartography *Nicolas Sanson* created a map depicting Florida, New Mexico, and the American Southwest. It was the first detailed view of these areas and was published in 1650 by Pierre Mariette. *Sanson* shaded lakes along the border, pictorially shaded relief, named Lake Ontario and Lake Superior the first time, and the Great Lakes are in an identifiable arrangement (Sanson, 1650). However, another prominent feature in *Sanson*’s 1650 map is the fact that he mapped California as an island, and Europeans, as potential settlers for new land, had this impression for decades. He also named prominent American Indian regions, like Apache and Navajo. In addition, *Sanson* also used sinusoidal projection in which the meridians are sinusoids and the parallels the equidistant straight lines divided into equal parts by the meridians (*Fig. 5*). This type of projection appeared the first time in *Jean Cossin*’s 1570 map “Carte cosmographique ou universelle description du monde avec le vrai traict vents” (Cossin, 1570).

Prior to *Sanson*’s 1650 map, *Sebastian Münster* may have used misleading observations for his 1540 map by Giovanni da Verrazano in 1524 in search of a new passage to the Pacific, showing that eastern North Carolina is near a body of water and concluded that it was what we now know as the Pacific Ocean. He named it the *Sea of Verrazano*, and it was also erroneously mapped in multiple versions of *Münster*’s “*Geographia Universalis*” for decades (Danzer, 2005).



Fig. 5. Sanson's map *Amérique septentrionale* (Sanson, 1650).

Promoting the New World in the sixteenth century, *Richard Hakluyt* was an Anglican minister and leading advocate of English overseas expansion and settlement in part of North America not already occupied by Spain. *Hakluyt* wrote three collections in English about exploration. In these, he introduced sailing directions, merchants' reports, and much more. He was consulted about overseas expansion projects though he personally never traveled further from England

than to Paris. Finally, encourage Europeans to migrate, combined with ministries control over territories, was imperative to becoming an influential leader and subsequently gaining recognition by other nations (Wallis, 2019).

The following 1606 “Map of Virginia,” based on sketches supplied by *John Smith* and published 1624 by *William Hole*, was a contribution to identifying accurately the geographic, topographic, and maritime layout of the Chesapeake Bay. The map illustrates locations and names of nearby Native American groups and settlements in this region where he distinguished between the chief residences and the villages where ordinary people lived (Smith and Hole, 1606). It turned out that this was for several decades the most significant colonial America map, with an accurate and detailed map of the Bay and Atlantic coastline, and several mapmakers used it as a basemap for their own maps of Virginia. The map gave an inside view of the bay for European settlers and is oriented west (the compass at the lower left is oriented with N to the right), including the nautical leagues and half-leagues scale (15 leagues are 68 millimeters on the map surface) and a latitude between 36° to 41° north. The Maltese cross on each river or mountain and other significant places indicates the geographical limits of Smith’s explorations and he marked the areas beyond the crosses as locations of different tribes. Additionally, he illustrated two different Indian figures, a giant Susquehanna (Sasquesahanough) Indian in armament on the right upper corner and Powhatan in state in a lodge on the left side (*Fig. 6*). The later English settlement in Jamestown, Chesapeake, is named as the first English colony chartered by the crown to protect against Spanish encroachment (Archives Research Services Virginia and Farrell, 2007). In 1616, Smith traveled to “Northern Virginia” on behalf of the Plymouth Company to explore the coastline for fisheries and search for gold. However, additionally he

used his observation to create a map for potential future colony locations (New England was colonized in 1620 by the Mayflower Pilgrims) and coined the area between 41° and 45°, a stretch from Pennobscot to Cape Cod “New England” in his descriptions.



Fig. 6. Map of Virginia created by Smith in 1606 (Smith and Hole).

His 1616 “New England” map to promote colonization shows several locations (towns, rivers, codes, islands, and bays) used names the Native Americans gave him, although he had to change several names on his origin map into names Prince Charles preferred before the map went into print. Smith acknowledged these changes on his map that: *“The most remarkable parts thus named by the high and mighty Prince Charles, nowe King of great Britainy”*

(Gambino, 2014). Prince Charles renamed some of the names to traditional English ones, like Cape Tragabigzanda to Cape Anne after his mother Queen Anne, or the Massachusetts River to Charles River, after himself, and Plimouth (today Plymouth), originally called Accomack by *Smith*, a name of a tribe settlement. Additionally, Cape Cod (explorer *Bartholomew Gosnold* named the landmark first in 1602 after he caught many codfish there), Prince Charles renamed it to Cape James; afterwards other names were given to the Cape by French, Dutch, and English, but that of Cape Cod alone held. In addition, Smith named Smith Islands after himself. Some of these English-derived names remained permanent, like the Charles River, Boston, and Cambridge. In fact, one can see that the entire map has not one name Smith received from the tribes, though the American Indians were a significant part in mapping these areas. Instead, the title “New England” and the English names were to lure the English to resettle from their native land into virgin soil owned by the crown and somehow like England (Royster, 2006, Archives Research Services Virginia and Farrell, 2007, Firstbrook, 2014).

Several decades later, a 1677 map by *John Foster*, “A Map of New-England,” was the first ever cut here, shows a pictorial relief. It is oriented with north to the right, with a scale, 14 miles to an inch (Engineering Department Boston, 1904, Foster, 1826). The accurate map, though distorted in size, shows interesting features, like ships sailing the sea, a drawing of two hunters and two animals (one could be a fox) and numbers attached to numerous towns. The meaning of these numbers connected to a town, also described on the map by Foster, references to those attacked by the Indians during King Philip’s War (1675-76) between New England colonists and Algonquin Indians (Foster, 1826).

However, the English were not the only nation claiming territory in the above-mentioned areas, but a number of European nations had important interests in North America and colonies as an important opportunity to own land, or driven by trade and religious freedom, for example the French in the north, along the St. Lawrence, and the Dutch, claiming areas between New England and the Chesapeake Bay. *Vinckeboons*, a Dutch geographer, produced a water colored map around 1639, “Pascaert van Nieuw Nederlandt Virginia, ende Nieuw-Engelandt verthonendt alles wat van die landin by See, oft by land is ondeckt oft Bekent.”, showing the northeast coast of the United States from New England to Virginia. He plotted costal features and other geographical entities, including the Dutch colony of New Netherlands established in 1621 and parts of Nouvelle France. An interesting feature is that town, island, and Cape names appear in their origin Indian names, like Smith’s 1616 “New England” map before he had to change names at Prince Charles’ order, but in addition, the English name for these locations is given as well (Accomack/Plimouth or Massachusits River/Charles River) (*Vinckeboons*, 1639?). Moreover, Indian tribes, and British and Dutch settlements and forts are shown, later in corresponding languages of the colonies. By the end of 1664, British colonists took control of New Netherlands, ending the Dutch colonial presence in North America.

Several years later, *Richard Daniel* produced his map of the English empire in America (Daniel, 1679) with the main purpose of showing that French, Dutch, and even English cartographers were inaccurate in mapping the English territorial boundaries in the region of the Atlantic coastline from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to south of the Chesapeake Bay. His claims were emphasized by an additional text, “*A New Description of The English Empire in the Continent of*

America,” on his map, which describes his intention to correct these misleading cartographic notions:

The designe of this Map is to divert one common and notorious Abuse that the Dutch and French (whose Maps being the Fondlings of this age) have imposed upon us: who have taken on them in their Maps and Books of Geography, (viz. of Blaeu, Sanson, &c.) to call the greatest part of our English Colonies . . . New Netherlands, and the French Maps Nova Francia; altering the names of English Towns and Places at their pleasure, into names of their own fancies and languages; as if they would deprive us of those vast Countries, of which the English were not onely first Discoverers, but Possessors also (Petto, 2018).

Daniel refers to the maps from the Dutch cartographers *Joan Blaeu* (Blaeu, 1648) and *Willem Janszoon Blaeu* (Blaeu, 1635?), father of Joan Blaeu, and French cartographer and royal engineer during Louis XIV, *Nicolas Sanson* (Sanson, 1656), among multiple other circulating maps at this time, are indeed incorrect in a variety of territorial boundaries and the naming of Dutch, French, or English possession.

A major problem was that cartographers’ copied existing or previous maps to save production costs and did not check for the older maps for correctness. Variants of *Joan Blaeu’s* world maps, for example, extended generously the boundaries for *Novum Belgium* (*Novi Belgii* or *New Netherland*) and included Dutch names as an evidence of Dutch possession, limiting the territory of New England and even used several times the native name *Almouchicoisi* for New England.

Similarly, cartography became more important to the French and their interests in gaining colonial territory in North America, with the aim of limiting English possessions. *Sansons'* map was not only an improvement to his previous 1650 map named "Amerique Septentrionale," it also shows for the first time Lake Erie, named *L. Erie, ou Du CHAT* and the territory of New France (*Nouvelle France*), including Canada (*LE CANADA OU NOUVELLE FRANCE*), but likewise limiting the presence of New England in the north. Comparing the territorial boundaries with *Willem Blaeu's* map (oriented with north towards the right) of New England (*Niev Engeland*) and New Netherlands (*Niev Nederlandt*), it's visible that in *Sanon's* edition, New Netherlands is divided into *Nouveau Pays Bas* and *N. Hollande* with an extension to Cape Cod, decreasing once again the territory of New England, now in the southern part (*Nouvelle Angleterre*). For French cartographers, it was a continuous minimizing of English territories and adding a French footprint to the interior. *Guillaume and Adrien*, both sons of *Nicolas Sanson*, published later maps of North America, still using *Sanson's* 1666 map of North America as a base with minimal English colonial territory (Petto, 2018).

Despite cartographic inaccuracies, *Willem Blaeu* represented the first time Manhattan (*Manatthans*) as an Island and placed a large amount of animals like deer, bears, turkeys, and foxes, and plants in particular regions on his map, in addition to a drawing of a Mohawk Indian village (*Modus muniendi apud Mahikanenses*) on the top right (*Fig. 7*). Ships in the Atlantic appear bearing Dutch flags (three strips) and Indian canoes approach the coastline of New Netherlands (Blaeu, 1635?).



Fig. 7. Willem Blaeu's map "Nova Belgica et Anglia Nova" (Blaeu, 1635?).

When analyzing Dutch maps, it is notable that on all maps are Native American toponym, images of Indian life, and cartographers even recognized the presence of their major villages or administrated areas.

Supporting the greater French territory, the colonial administration under Louis XIV ordered geographical information in form of drafting maps and reports from the North American French territories by royal officials or cartographers to improve existing maps and to show the

extension of the French territory. This interest is well illustrated in the texts of the famous *Jean-Baptiste Colbert*, comptroller general of finance and secretary of state for the navy under King Louis XIV and found widely in *Colbert's letters, instructions, and memoires*, especially within his third volume, titled *Colonies* (Colbert, 1865), or throughout his *Administration Provincial* instructions for colonial officials (Colbert, 1867).

The English responded to the French cartographic challenge by creating maps that are more accurate. *Richard Daniel's* map of North America's Atlantic coast from the Gulf of St.

Lawrence to the south of the Chesapeake Bay (Daniel, 1679), largely based on contemporary English

sources, claims the correct boundaries of New England and beyond. It is even worth mentioning that *Daniel* has latitude and longitude, and a scale (W 79° - W 56° / N 50° - N 37°) as cartographic elements on his map. Richly embellished with fauna and flora, hunting scenes inland and even a scene of whaling in the Atlantic Ocean, off the southern coast of Long Island, near South Hampton. Furthermore, imaginary mountain ranges, notable *Apalitean Mountains* (Appalachian Mountains), numerous inland Native American settlements, and for the first time several roads, especially two roads connecting Boston with Springfield, located on the east side of the Connecticut River and Hartford on the west side, deserve a special mention. *Robert Morden*, an English publisher and mapmaker mentioned on a variety of maps as a contributor, including *Daniel's* Map of the English Empire, and also sold *Gregory King's* New England map (King, 1676). These are mentioned here because King included a manuscript key identifying colored boundaries with corresponding colonies as a new geographical description of a map.

Daniel's map represents part of an obvious shift from maps as an advertisement for Europeans to settle into the New World, and/or maps as instruments of an imagined power and territorial

possessions, to a more objective representation of the topography. This shift occurred from the mid-sixteenth into the seventeenth century.

With this change in mind, we now turn mainly to French cartography of the Mississippi Valley and Louisiana.

During the reign of Louis XIV, colonial officials supported new exploratory voyages in the interior of the continent. *Jean-Baptist Colbert* authorized *Jean Talon* to organize several expeditions and later put the French Canadian surveyor and cartographer *Louis Joliet* in charge to survey the Great River (Mississippi River). *Joliet* (Jolliet) went as far as the Mississippi River where it comes together with the Arkansas River. Unfortunately, during his return to Montreal he lost all his records, but he provided a map from his memory, including multiple American Indian villages (Joliet, 1674). Joliet called the Great River “La Riviere Buade” after New France Governor *Louis de Buade*, Comte de Frontenac (Dawson, 1905) and the Arkansas River “Riviere Basire,” with an assumed rendering all the way to the Gulf of Mexico (*Le Sein de Mexique*).

With the support of Governor *Frontenac* and the French crown, *Robert Cavalier de la Salle* took formal possession of the Mississippi Valley after establishing a series of fur-trading posts in the Great Lakes region and built a military and commercial empire with as many forts as he wanted for France down the Mississippi River all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. In 1682, *La Salle* claimed the river and the entire region drained by the waters for King Louis XIV and called the new French territory “Louisiana” to honor the King. Returning to France, *La Salle* requested royal support for his colony, but his maps had to falsify the geography of the Mississippi river as an optimal location for staging incursions into Spanish settlements and attacks on the Spanish

French cartographer *Nicolas De Fer* used the manuscript map of Franquelin and others to create a new map of the Gulf Coast and the Mississippi River region (Fer and Ginville, 1701). The map shows interesting feature like the Fort Biloxi (*Bilo[x]y I. Village*) labeled with ...*Mr. le Chevallier d'Iberville en 1699* and included *La Salle's* information of multiple Native American village locations he explored throughout his expeditions and depicted *La Salle's* detailed material from along the Gulf Coast and, for the first time, Texas in particular. Most important, he corrected the erroneous location of *La Salle's* Mississippi mouth.

French economic interests led to the creation of a map considered as one of the most important and influential map of the region at this time, if only because it was part of a major economic scandal. In September 1712, King Louis XIV gave *Antoine Crozat* control over all trading and commercial rights within the colony and the privilege to govern the colony in accordance with French laws and customs (Louis XIV King of France, 1712). However, *Crozat* failed to manage the colony, including the economy, well, resulting that in 1717, the royal administration under the regent of the nephew of King Louis XIV, *Philippe, Duke of Orléans* granted the control over trade to the Scottish financier John Law's *Compagnie d'Occident* (Company of the West or otherwise called the French East-India Company). Soon, Law hired *Nicolas de Fer* to create a map of French Louisiana, including natural resources to demonstrate the wealth of the territory, to attract French investors and colonists likewise (Fer and Compagnie des Indes occidentales, 1718). *Fer* incorporated work from earlier explorers (*Pere Hennepin, de La Salle, Tonti, Laontan, Joustel, des Hayes, and Joliet*) and *Maire*, a Jesuit Missionary in America who he credited on his map. Divided into two parts, the map shows the area and surroundings of the northern Mississippi River including the Great Lakes as far to the

coastline of the Gulf of Mexico, incorporating east of what is now Florida, Mississippi, and Alabama. On top of the map, *Fer* presents a detailed view of the Mississippi mouth and the coastline from *Baye de L'Ascension* in the west to *Baye St. Joseph* in the east. The map and misleading publicity material about the wealth of Louisiana drove intense land speculations until the end of 1720 when *Law* fled France after his system collapsed, known as the infamous “*Mississippi Scheme*” speculation bubble and his company had been put in liquidation (1720). Nevertheless, between 1717 and 1722, after *Law* granted emigration expenses, he paid personally the expenses of 200 Germans, German, Switzerland, and Low Countries families and individuals settled along the Mississippi River, an area above New Orleans (Henderson, 2015), mapped for the first time by *Saucier* (1749) and known as the German Coast or *La Côte des Allemands* (Fig. 9).

Part of the success of *Law*'s emigration scheme was based on the explorations at the mouth of the Mississippi by the *Le Moyne* brothers from Quebec. *Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne De Bienville* and his elder brother *Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville* have been studied and written about extensively by historians, as they were the first Europeans to enter the Mississippi from the open sea in March 1699. *Iberville* died on July 9, 1706 in Havana during an expedition to the West Indies. *Bienville* stayed in Louisiana, explored the Mississippi River and administered the territory for a decade when he was 21 years. In 1717, with *John Law* still in control of the French territory, *Bienville* obtained the role of commandant general of the *Compagnie d'Occident* colony and was for the later responsible for the royal defense. In spring 1718, *Bienville* was in charge of establishing a company trading post and a town; he chose the banks of the Mississippi River, near the portage of Bayou St. John. In honor of the company's friend *Philippe II, Duke of*

Orléans, he called it *La Nouvelle Orléans*, or New Orleans, shown on a card, which included the name *La Nouvelle Orleans* in 1718 between the enclosed space of the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain (Villiers du Terrage et al., 1920). This card literally put New Orleans on the map.

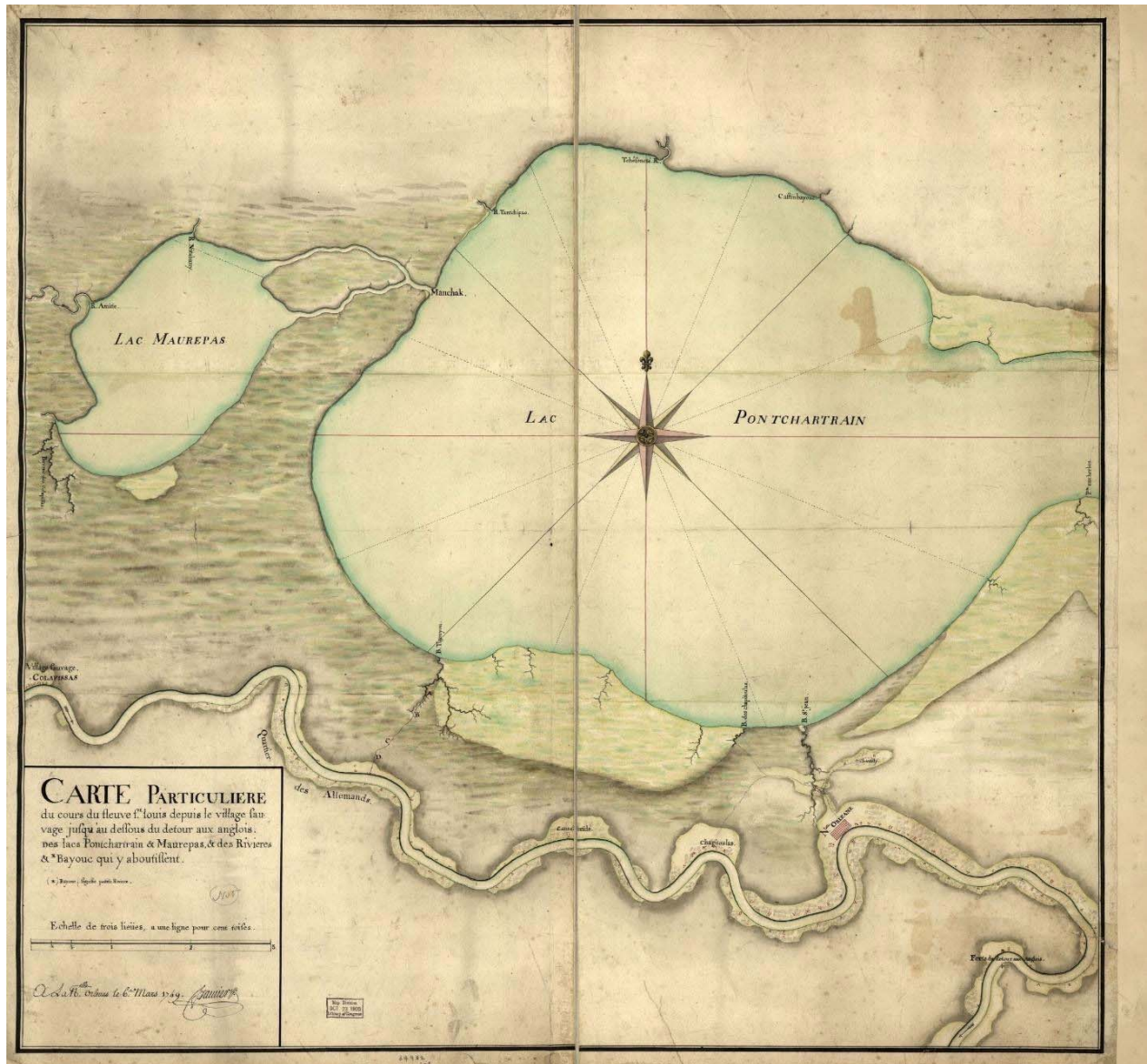


Fig. 9. Saucier's map showing the "Quartier des Allemands" (Saucier, 1749).

The Mississippi River flood in 1719 drowned New Orleans under half a foot of water and destroyed partially the structure of the four dwellings (three Canadian houses and a store

belonging to the Company (Villiers du Terrage et al., 1920)) constructed after the town's establishment. *Sieur Le Blond de La Tour*, chief of the engineers for Louisiana, reassessed the site after he completed his engineering work at Fort Maurepas of Biloxi and laid out the new Ville de la Nouvelle Orleans as a regular city (Blond de la Tour and Jefferys, 1759). The map shows important places marked on the legend, such as the house of the intendant, the jails, the hospital and the Convent of the Ursulines.

Over time, the Mississippi River appears in three different names, River St. Louis, Mississippi, and Meshassepi, called by the natives. De la Tours' mouth of the Mississippi River map includes a plan of Fort Balise. However, the symmetry and layout of the town New Orleans looks like his plan of Biloxi with a grid of squares and a church facing a public square as a center (Le Blond de la Tour, 1722?, 1721b). *Adrien de Pauger*, who officiated as a surveyor, cleared the space for the town, aligned the streets, assigned squares and lots, prepared plans of the whole city under the supervision of *de la Tour*, containing the names of the owners to the allotments, and oversaw the construction of the first blocks (King, 1676). Worth mentioning is that sixteenth- century Italian architect *Serlio* (Serlio, 1663) influenced *Pauger* and *Tour* in their geometry and seventeenth century French engineer *Vauban* in laying out the city (Vauban, 1702).

Even unsigned, the *Plan de la Nouvelle Orleans* (1721a) and the *Plan de la Ville de la Nouvelle Orleans* (1723) for the newly-created capital of Louisiana are undoubtedly copies of *de la Tour's* plan (*Fig. 10*). The center of the town has all public buildings and the church facing a public square "*Place of Arms*," and Hank additionally has the director's house on one side and the stores on the other. The city outlet has a tight grid of squares, each three hundred feet a side, divided into five or twelve lots with a common lot dimension of 60 French feet wide and 120

feet deep, (64 * 128 in English feet), and sometimes including a shape of a building.

Furthermore, the 1721 plan shows *Bienville's* plantation beyond the canal. A notable difference between both plans is that the 1723 plan has no street names and the 1721 *Plan de la Nouvelle Orleans* does have names for the most of the city's streets.

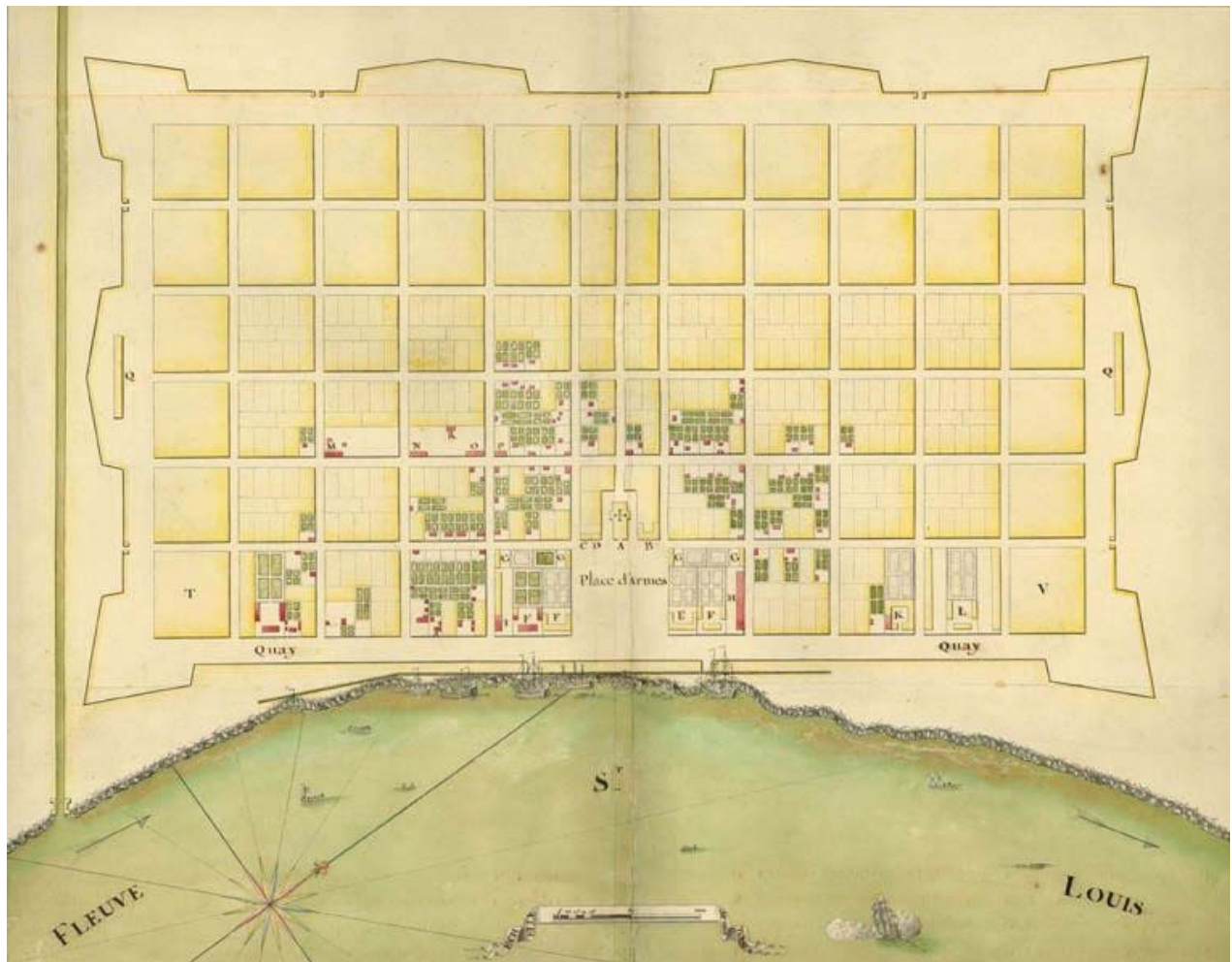


Fig. 10. Plan de la Ville de la Nouvelle Orleans 1723 by an unknown cartographer (1723)

One indicator to distinguish if circulating plans of the city were made by *de la Tour* or *Pauger* is the street naming. Names appear for the first time in the first quarter of 1723 on *de la Tour's* plans and after *de la La Tour* died in October 1724, *Pauger* finished specifying the streets

including renaming some of previous *de la La Tour* labels to leave his mark on the founding of the city of New Orleans. Examples are: *Rue de L'Arsenal* into *Saint-Adrien* (Pauger's patron) later known as *Sainte-Ursule* and *des Ursulines* or *Rue de Quai* to *Quai*, later appearing on New Orleans city plans as *Old Levee*, and *Rue Royale* into *Royale-Bourbon* (1725, Villiers du Terrage et al., 1920).

Comparing the first hundred years of published maps, you can see a clear alteration in how topographic information is presented. Despite the genuine need for accurate maps between colonial officials and their respective governments regarding territory boundaries, usually with a focus on the North American coastline, the actual maps generally did not meet this need. At the beginning, the maps were decorated with the elaborate armorial bearings of the new sovereign, dedications to the ruling King, and ships in the seas displaying the respective royal ensign, symbols mapmakers created to ensure the crown authority over the depicted regions on the map. Unfortunately, the maps were usually grossly inaccurate, as we have seen. In the sixteenth century, however, a new sense of international law was created, culminating eventually in the work of Hugo Grotius (1625) and his chapter "*Acquisition of ownership of things.*" Under these new conventions, a fanciful map alone was not enough to claim territory; international law now required proof of physical and continuous occupation of an empty land and ruled by the crown to show the establishment of a lawful sovereign territory. Control of the new territory now demanded fortifications, creating landmarks, publishing activities reports of explorers and settlers, and gaining the tribute of natives. These laws put royals and colonial officials on the spot, with the result that mapmakers were much in demand, although they were often not more accurate in practice than the earlier ones. *Nicola van Sype's* map, for

instance, erroneously showed English territories in North America, using English-originated terms like “Nova Albion” for a region, and included Elizabethan coats of arms at the Strait of Magellan and Nova Albion. But to emphasize the legitimate possession based on the European “acquisition law,” he additionally verified with insets explorations done by Drake and Raleigh in these areas on his map (Syype, 1581).

Similar signs on maps of a well-explored territory are the placement of native scenes, drawings of Indians, symbols of settlements, and trees, rivers, and mountain ranges in unknown spaces. Examples of such geographical work of the sixteenth and seventeenth century to prove rightful possession are *Theodore de Bry’s* Latin map of Virginia (Bry et al., 1590) and the above mentioned *John Smith* map from the same area (Smith and Hole, 1606). Both are oriented with north to the right.

Thus even if proof of possession has changed over time and geographical illustrations were adjusted continuously, the printed versions of these maps still reflect the European aspirations for territories in the New World (Ken, 2003, Petto, 2018).

However, inaccurate maps had unfortunate consequences in real life. Following the New Orleans town maps published after *Le Blond de la Tour* and *Adrien de Pauger Bienville* then had a military need for an accurate map in his struggles with the Indians. *Pauger* died in June 1726 and instead of appointing *Charles de Morand*, *La Tour* and *Pauger’s* assistant surveyor in Biloxi and New Orleans, as official replacement, *Ignace François Broutin*, a native of northern France and commandant in Natchez, served as royal engineer until his death in 1751 (Poesch and Bacot, 1997, Toledano and Christovich, 1980). Meanwhile, the war between the Chickasaw and

the Choctaw tribes were brought to *Bienville's* attention. Chickasaws on the east side of the Mississippi traded with the British, whereas the majority of the Choctaws, allied with the French, lived on the western part of the River. After the Chickasaws stopped the French trading on the river, *Bienville* decided to support the Choctaws by attacking the Chickasaws. To aid in his efforts to explore the Mississippi and Mobile River in detail, he sent *Broutin* and *Bernard Devergé (de Verges)*, a former draftsman from *La Tour*, to explore the shortest and best routes into the Chickasaw country. Both engineers returned 1739 with the result that the distance from both rivers are equal. *Bienville* himself selected the route following the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers mapped by *Devergé*, only to learn during his mission, that *Devergé's* map was wrong and he had to end his purpose of defense after losing men, livestock, and a road to the tribe (Franz, 1906). As seen on *Broutin's* map, he inserted a detailed navigation description but the marked trail above the *Rivierre des Yazoux* in a dotted line was actually unsuitable for heavy military wagons in addition to showing some river branches which did not correspond to the right length and distance to the Chickasaw villages. However, the map also shows numerous forts along the Mississippi River and other trails to French-allied Indians (Broutin et al., 1743). Nevertheless, *Broutin*, in addition to his Mississippi explorations, is famous for designing the first Ursuline Convent's façade (Poesch and Bacot, 1997).

During this time, and after his failed Chickasaw mission, *Bienville* had to resign in 1742 and the new appointed ruler of the colony was *Pierre François de Rigaud Cavagnal* until 1752. *Bernard Devergé* succeeded *Broutin* and *Hypolite Amelot*, a French engineer, followed *Devergé* after his death in 1766. During this time, multiple plans of the city appeared from different surveyors using *La Tour's* and *Pauger's* maps as a base. The founders of the city made extensions of the

growing city following the same square block pattern and lot divisions. In addition to geometrically correct plans, hundreds of depictions, sketches, and drawings from New Orleans' citizens, visitors, and adventurers alike appeared in books, diaries, announcements, or in the form of pictorial maps. These illustrations provide to some extent detailed descriptions about the life and the environment in which the people lived. During this time, the work of French born explorer *Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny* is representative of the other mapmakers of this time. *Dumont's* map of the French territory, pictured in his first historical memoirs about Louisiana, shows the Chickasaw (*Pays des Chicachas*) and Choctaw (*Pays des Chactas*) territories, separated by a mountain ridge, along with multiple forts (e.g. *Fort des Illinois*, *Fort S. François*, *Fort Natchez*, and *Fort Rosalie*), a few French possessions with dates (*Fort Natchez 1730*, *Fort de l'Assomption Fr. en 1739 et 40*), and early settlements (*Biloxi*, *Paskagoulas*, *Baton Rouge*, and *Nouvelle Orleans*) (Dumont de Montigny and Le Mascrier, 1753b). Even considering Dumont's mistakes in showing geographically correct locations, the historical information about the territory is of much value (Dumont de Montigny and Le Mascrier, 1753b).

Arriving in New Orleans, Dumont described in detail the city, the environment, and in particular the city's layout with squares and lots, in his second memoirs about Louisiana, as follows:

[...] envoya le S^r. de la Tour, Chef des Ingénieurs, avec ordre de choisir dans ce petit canton un emplacement propre à bâtir une Ville digne de devenir la Capitale, & la fource à laquelle toutes les autres habitations qui commençoient à se former pussent avoir recours, pour en tirer du soulagement.

Le sieur de la Tour ne fut pas plutôt arrivé dans cet endroit, qui ne consistoit alors qu'en quelques habitations peu considérables dispersées çà & là & qui avoient été formées par quelques Voyageurs descendus des Illinois, qu'il y fit faire le long du Fleuve un défriché assez grand & assez vaste, pour qu'il pût y mettre à exécution le plan qu'il s'étoit proposé; ensuite à l'aide de quelques Piqueurs il traça sur le terrain les rues & les quartiers qui devoient composer la nouvelle Ville, & fit avertir que tous ceux qui voudroient avoir des emplacements pour bâtir, eussent à présenter leur Requête au Conseil. On donnoit à chaque habitant qui s'offroit, dix toises de face sur vingt de profondeur & comme chaque quartier avoit cinquante toises en carré, on conçoit qu'il devoit y avoir dans chacun douze habitans, dont les deux du milieu avoient dix toises de face sur vingt-cinq toises de profondeur. Il fut ordonné que ceux qui obtiendroient de ces emplacements, seroient obligés de les fermer de palissades, & de laisser tout autour un terrain vuide de la largeur de trois pieds au moins, au pied duquel seroit creusé un fossé pour servir d'écoulement aux eaux du Fleuve dans la saison où il se déborde. Non-seulement le sieur de la Tour se crut obligé de faire ordonner ces canaux, qui se communiquent les uns aux autres de quartier en quartier; mais même pour préserver la Ville de l'inondation il fit élever au-devant, & proche d'une petite élévation qui conduit au Fleuve, une digue ou levée de terre, & fit creuser au pied un pareil fossé d'écoulement (Dumont de Montigny and Le Mascrier, 1753a).

Dumont described the city with straight streets, habitant lots of **ten toises (fathoms)** wide and **twenty deep** within a square (block) of **fifty toises square (300 French feet)**. Each square was divided into twelve *terrains* or lots.

of whom the two properties in the middle have a length of approximately fifty-three yards and a width of twenty-one yards, parallel the street (*Fig. 11*). In addition, he mentioned appreciatively the engineer *de la Tour* in his planning of a levee and how he designed the streets, three feet wide and incorporating a one foot wide ditch, connecting each block, and how this drainage discharge water to the river during flooding seasons to preserve the city from the flood.

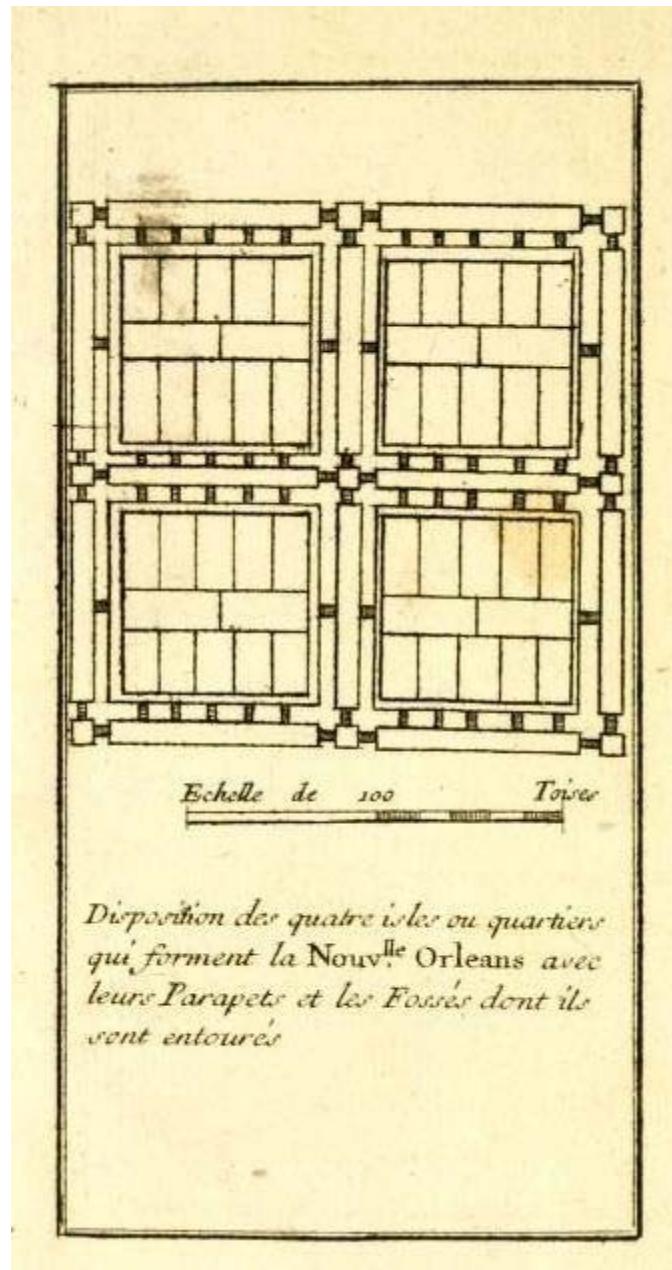


Fig. 11. Dumont's description of New Orleans block and square layout (Dumont de Montigny and Le Mascrier, 1753a).

One of his multiple New Orleans plans is a pictorial New Orleans map (oriented northeast at the top), *Plan de la N.^{lle} Orleans ville Capitale de la Louissianne*, where he mainly focused on the

environment and identifies land concessions and settlements surrounding the city up to Bayou St. John (*Bayou Saint Jean*), land occupied by slaves. He additionally drew four blocks to demonstrate the town's block arrangements with lot divisions within a square for inhabitants (Dumont de Montigny, 1747). Again, there are multiple cartographic errors but the map is to be valued for historic purpose. Besides mapping terrains on a large and small scale, he also published multiple drawings of animals, trees, and Indians he observed throughout his journeys in the New World.

Before focusing on New Orleans' maps made by Spanish cartographers after the French colony was ceded to Spain in 1762, a few more maps clearly politically motivated should be mentioned. One interesting, even if bizarre for the most part, is the map with three- dimensional buildings, facing the street. This is found in a New Orleans plan by *Jean Baptiste Simon Thierry* (Thierry, 1755). The map shows with reasonable accuracy lots and houses with gardens, the cemetery and markets, in addition to sailing ships on the Mississippi River, the Ursuline Convent and labeled governmental buildings along the river. Nevertheless, the uniformly populated squares in the northern part of the city depict a non-existing population and unbuilt homes. Again, the purpose was likely to please Louis XV by demonstrating a successfully populated colony (*Fig. 12*). The actual limits of populated New Orleans is documented throughout multiple plans of New Orleans after 1755, for instance the plan by *Benning* published around 1761 (Benning) with squares and houses no further north than Bourbon Street (*Rue de Bourbon*) and vegetation afterwards. (Noticed on his map that the street *Saint Adrien* named by *Pauger* is back to *Rue de l'Arcenal*).

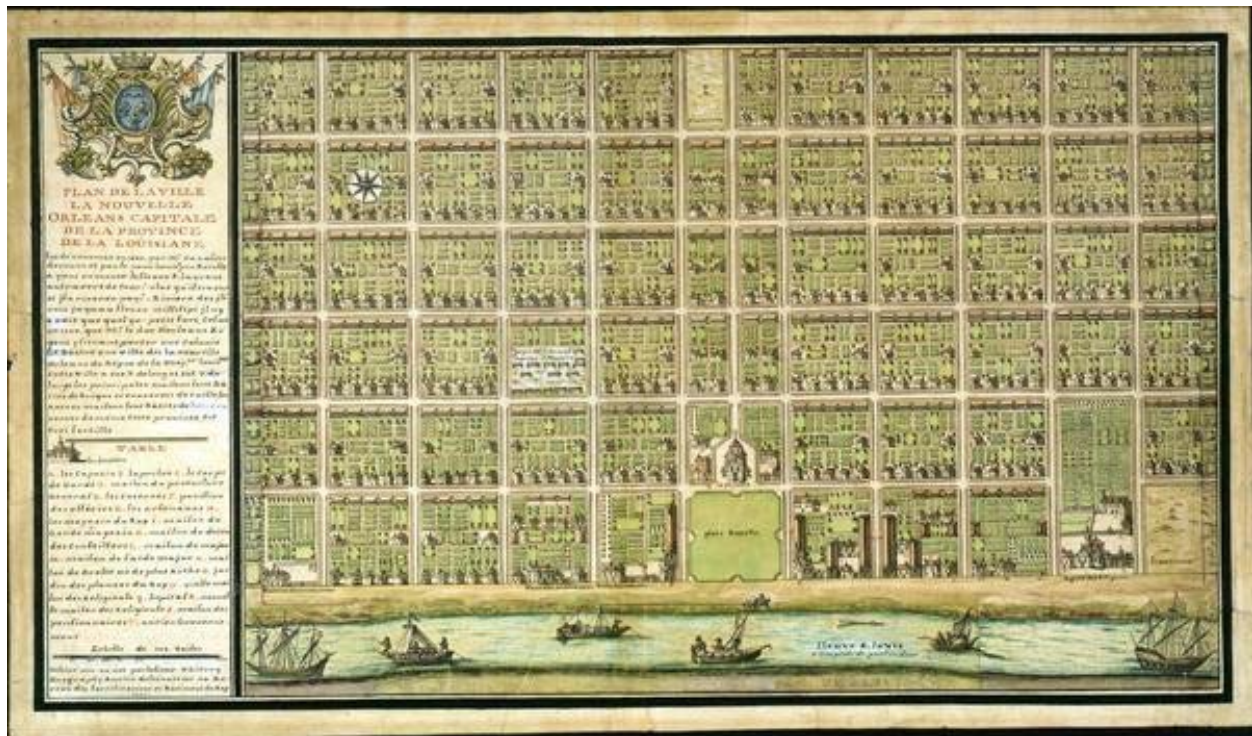


Fig. 12. Thierry's unrealistic map from New Orleans, 1755 (Thierry).

Furthermore, the controversies about territorial boundaries between the French and English was an ongoing issue and resulted in a large number of maps representing solely the interests of either side. One of these politically driven map is by *John Huske* overestimating British territory and reducing the French land claims (Huske et al., 1755). He described in detail the rightful English possessions by pointing to treaties made since 1701 and colored all the territories accordingly on his map. An even more delicate cartographic work about British claimed territories is *Overton's* published map of North America. Historic notes and texts about fourteen British colonies, including Newfoundland, surround the map and to drive home his point he has insets accusing French cartographers of malpractice:

The French Mapmakers and their Agents in London have the Folly to traverse our Colonies with dotted Lines, pretending a Claim to half our Settlements, but the whole is unjust and false; [...]

Overton tried everything to justify the English territorial claims, even stating directly on his map close to the Oyo River, “*These Parts and Rivers were discovered by the English in 1634*” (Fig. 13) (*Overton and Seale, 1755*).



Fig. 13. Overton’s map with his English territorial claim (*Overton and Seale, 1755*).

French cartographer *D’Anville’s* map of the same area is certainly a contrast to *Huske* and *Overton* on French possessions (*Anville et al., 1755*). He recognized British possession from the Atlantic coastline inland as far as the Appalachian Mountains but named everything afterwards in French nomenclature. Beyond the political agenda, *d’Andville* mapped countless Indian

tribes, Sioux (*Sious*) not mentioned on *Huske's* but on *Overton's* map (*Sioux*), and forts along the Mississippi River and further east. Moreover, he drew known areas in great detail, left unknown areas blank and did not depict unverified geographical features, qualities that gave *d'Andville* the reputation of an accurate mapmaker during his time (Bassett and Porter, 1991).

After the French king surrendered the Louisiana territory west of the Mississippi River and New Orleans to Spain in 1763, New Orleans experienced two severe fires in 1788 and 1794. The transition period, ending in 1801 when Spain gave Louisiana back to France, is depicted in multiple maps. A Spanish version of *d'Andville's* Louisiana and *Bellini's* New Orleans map, published by *López de Vergas Machuca*, depicts the town of New Orleans, the Mississippi Valley north to the Canadian border, each in a special inset (López de Vargas Machuca et al., 1762). The nomenclature is entirely Spanish with the Mississippi named *Rio Misissipi* (missing an "s"), the street name Quay changed to *Muelle*, a synonym for dock, and Rue Royale named into *Calle Real*. It also included numerous Indian tribes and their settlements, forts, towns, and smaller villages, and rivers. Interesting though is that in the inset on the top right with the northern part of the Mississippi River, the word "*incognito*" is used for unknown area.

The spelling of "Mississippi" was slowly standardized. The river appeared as *Micissipy* on *Lefargue's* map (Lefargue, 1768) in the French language, but there was a nomenclature transition in the late 1760s and for the first time the Mississippi River's spelling included the second "p" (*Mississippi*), notable on *Pittman's* New Orleans's city map (Pittman, 1770).

Additionally, Pittman mapped the city with six block rows in deep towards Bayou St. John and included squares without concessions (*The Dotted Squares are lots not yet granted*) surrounding the town.

The most prominent maps of New Orleans's fires (March 21, 1788, and December 8, 1794) cartographers made in the aftermath of both are:

1. the *Plan showing the boundaries of the great conflagration of New Orleans on the 21st of March 1788* (1788),
2. the *Plano de la ciudad de Nueva Orleans: Las linias rojas demuestran la parte destruida por el incendio acaecido el dis ocho de diciembre de 1794* (1794), and
3. the *Plano volante que manifiesta la parte de la villa de Nueva Orleans consumida en el incendio de 8 de diciembre de 1794* (Perchet, 1794).

The 1788 fire map by an unknown cartographer shows the most populous blocks of the city in black and blocks with a low density of population in grey. The magnitude of the fire, emphasized additionally with pictorial flames, stretched across almost half of the entire populated city between present Dauphine, Conti, and St. Philip Street. The author inserted a note that the fire started at the corner of Toulouse and Chartres Streets in the office of the military treasurer. In addition, we can see new street naming for extended blocks, such as Hospital, Barracks, Customhouse, Dauphine, and Burgundy Streets, and *d'Arsenal* changed again, now to *Ursulines*. In contrast, the 1794 fire map depicts each block in detail, using red to trace all the lost buildings and gardens, stretching from the tobacco stores (*Almacenes de Tabaco*) on the east side close to the river as far as to the *Plaza de Armas*. Comparing the latter illustration, *Perchet* in his 1794 drawing faded the blocks caught by the fire to demonstrate the extent of the fire (*Principio del Fuego*) and additionally pointed to lost government buildings at the corner of present Toulouse and Chartres Street.

During the Spanish rule, *Carlos Laveau Trudeau* became surveyor general of Louisiana, following *Hypolite Amelot's* death. His 1798 map of New Orleans, published possibly at least four to five times, with different or changing numbers of land concessions and plantations, includes a set of blocks, the present Central Business District or CBD. These blocks have a note on the map that the land is not occupied, and additionally, adjacent plantations with detailed information about the ownership, property notes, and measurement of the land area in arpents (Trudeau, 1798c). An arpent is equivalent to about 180 French feet or 192 English feet in a unit of length or 0.84 acres. Furthermore, he included fortifications, the Canal Carondelet, the sawmill canal running through *Peter de Marigny's* plantation, and a second cemetery (present St. Louis Cemetery No.

1) behind the city border following an imaginary line of St. Louis Street. Land not occupied between the city limits and Lake Pontchartrain was mapped uniformly with trees, which he named Cypress swamp, and the street name *Muelle* changed to *Levee*. Trudeau died in 1816 (Toledano and Christovich, 1980). In July 1803, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from Napoleon for \$ 15 million.

Around 1789 a native of France, *Barthélémy Lafon* arrived in New Orleans. He was involved in multiple public works projects in addition to designing numerous houses in the city. His work for the city of New Orleans and the surrounding areas as a surveyor, his public appearance, and his life as a pirate have lasting fame, but his contributions to New Orleans and Louisiana must wait for the following chapter.

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CHAPTER 4.

LAFON AS A SURVEYOR AND CITY PLANNER:

Gabriele Richardson with Jay Edwards

Barthélémy Lafon's life in New Orleans and Louisiana is well documented over the course of the last 200 years (Chapter 2). In this chapter we focus on Lafon as a surveyor of plantations and city properties, and as a city engineer. We explore how his career as an architect, geographer, real estate developer, business person, publisher, politician, and military man, influenced the development of the Louisiana Territory, though to this day he has never received the scholarly recognition he deserves.

During Lafon's time in New Orleans until the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Carlos Laveau Trudeau was Surveyor General of Spanish Louisiana. In 1803, he refused to turn his records of land grants over to the Americans. However, Vincente Sebastiano Pintado, Trudeau's successor, took many of his surveys, which he later transferred to Havana. His surveys of land grants (Fig. 4.1a) were valuable for the resolution of land claims and in defending against frauds under the new American administration. Many of the earlier surveys were eventually recovered and preserved (Haas 1986; Weddle 1995). Several of these are preserved in American archives (Toledano and Christovich, 1980). A 1873 copy of Pintado's 1804 map of New Orleans and vicinity shows information compiled by Pintado in 1795-96 regarding property lines and landowners between the city limits and Bayou Saint John and set down by Trudeau in official records in 1804. Pilié, the New Orleans Surveyor in 1838, verified this map (Fig. 4.1b).



Fig. 4.1a. Copy and Translation from the Original Spanish Plan Dated 1798, Showing the City of New Orleans, Its Fortifications and Environs (Trudeau and Debrunner, 1875).

Joseph Pilié came with his family to New Orleans from Saint-Domingue, escaping the slave rebellion of the 1790s. He worked for Lafon for two years. Lafon trained him geography and cartography, copying, redrawing plans, and maps. He must have been a bright student for Pilié became city surveyor in 1819 (Mahé et al. 1987). Lafon drew on Spanish maps when creating his own but he also relied on geographers coming as refugees from the Caribbean. Another surveyor from Saint-Dominique was Jacques Tanesse, who worked with Lafon on a Mississippi River map. Lafon hired him as his publishing agent in Washington D.C. (Strang, 2018).

One of Lafon's first recorded contracts in New Orleans was with the New Orleans *cabildo* (city council) for repairs of the public jail (1794). This was immediately following the second great fire which destroyed the Cabildo (building). Lafon was awarded 1,130 pesos for the work (Wilson and Huber 1970: 23). Other public works projects included the improvements of bridges, repairs to the riverfront levees, and in 1798 the construction of a tile-roofed, wooden framed fish market near the levee. For this, Governor Gayoso de Lemos granted Lafon some prime real estate at no cost with the expectation that he would establish a foundry and would not be allowed to put up permanent buildings. His property boundaries were in a segment surrounded by today's Common Street, Carondelet, Canal, and Camp Street in what is now the Central Business District. These are marked with an "L" on Trudeau's 1799 map (Fig. 4.2). The foundry was, apparently, never constructed.

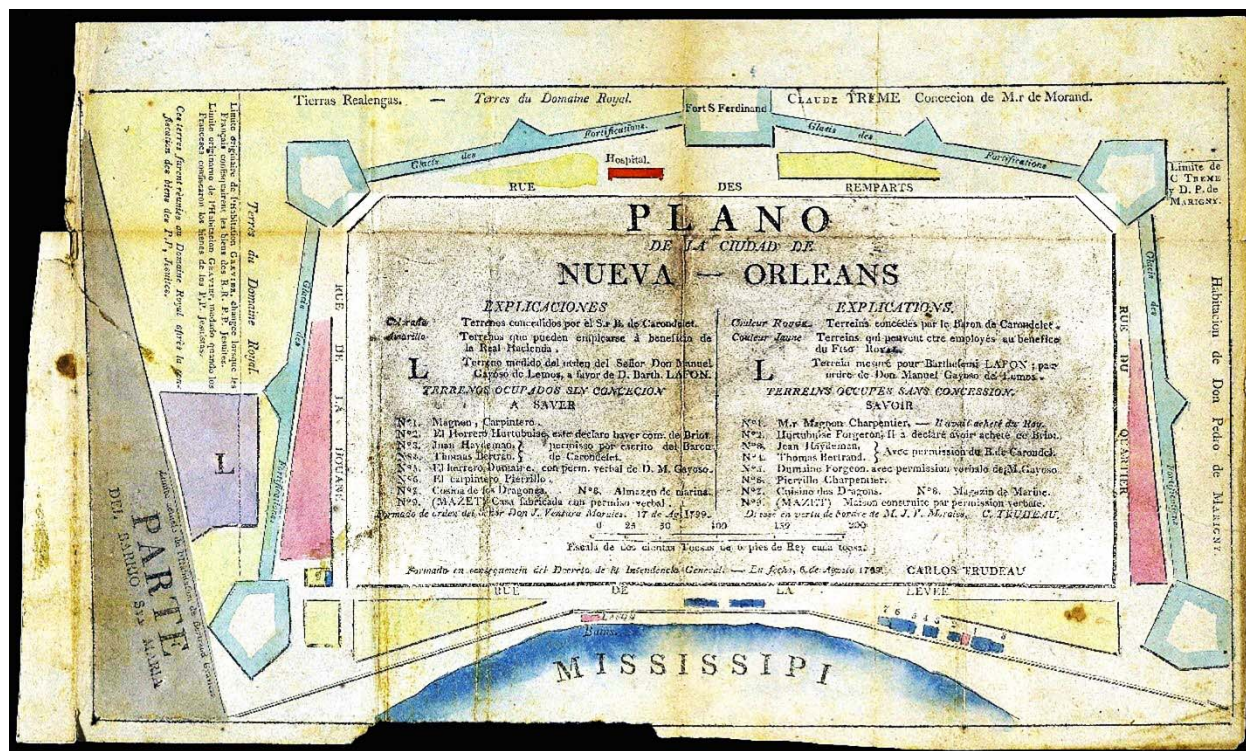


Fig. 4.2. Plano de la ciudad de Nueva Orleans (Trudeau, 1799). This plan records Lafon's property in payment for his work on the city fish market (in lavender and marked "L").

In 1801, Lafon acquired the former Maxant concession (plantation) in Chef Menteur, for 3,000 piastres. Some historians surmise that Lafon purchased it on purpose so that he and other privateers could smuggle their goods in from the coast into New Orleans through Bayou Sauvage, that passed directly by this habitation (Davis 2005: 124). In his will, Lafon called his plantation "*L'Heureuse Folie*" ("Happy Folly"), its location clearly indicated on an 1815 map created by Latour (Fig. 4.3). The plantation is located east of New Orleans in much the same place indicated on Lafon's own 1806 *Carte Général du territoire d'Orleans...* (Fig. 4.4) and also on a crude sketch of the plantation Lafon drew in 1809, where he depicted a house built of cypress, three cabins, and a brickyard. During the British invasion of Louisiana in 1814-1815, General Jackson ordered the Battalion of Free Men of Color to Lafon's plantation until the defense of Bayou Sauvage and Chef Menteur Pass was strengthened (Smith et al., 1997). Even before the invasion, General James Wilkinson had ordered Lafon to survey the city's

defensive fortifications (Fig. 4.5) and to create plans of these forts. Lafon even prepared one fort (Fort Petite Coquilles) to protect the Chef Menteur Pass between Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Catherine (Fig. 6).¹

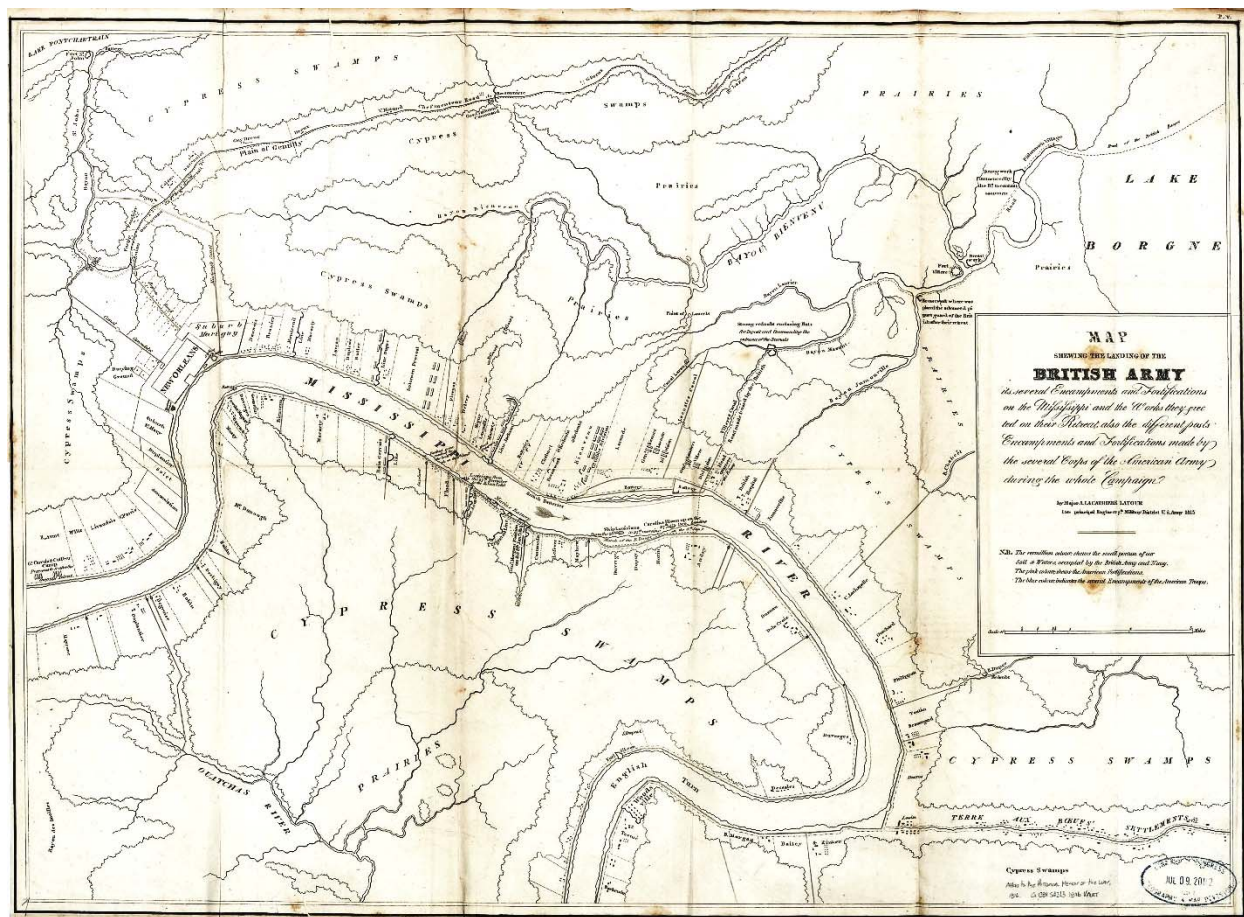


Fig. 4.3. *Map Shewing The Landing Of The British Army* (Latour 1815). Lafon's plantation is located at the very top center of the map, south of Chef Menteur Road and Bayou Savage.

"The most comprehensive early printed map of lower Louisiana was prepared by surveyor and engineer Barthélemy Lafon in New Orleans in 1806 at the request of the governor and members of the legislature" (Ehrenberg 2003: 125; Lafon 1805-1806; Fig. 4.4a).



Fig. 4.4a. Carte générale du territoire d'Orléans comprenant aussi la Floride Occidentale et une portion du territoire du Mississipi (Lafon 1806, HNOC). This is a large printed map.



Fig. 4.4b. Detail of Lafon's Carte générale du territoire d'Orléans comprenant aussi la Floride Occidentale et une portion du territoire du Mississipi, showing location of Lafon's plantation on Bayou Sauvage (Lafon, 1806).

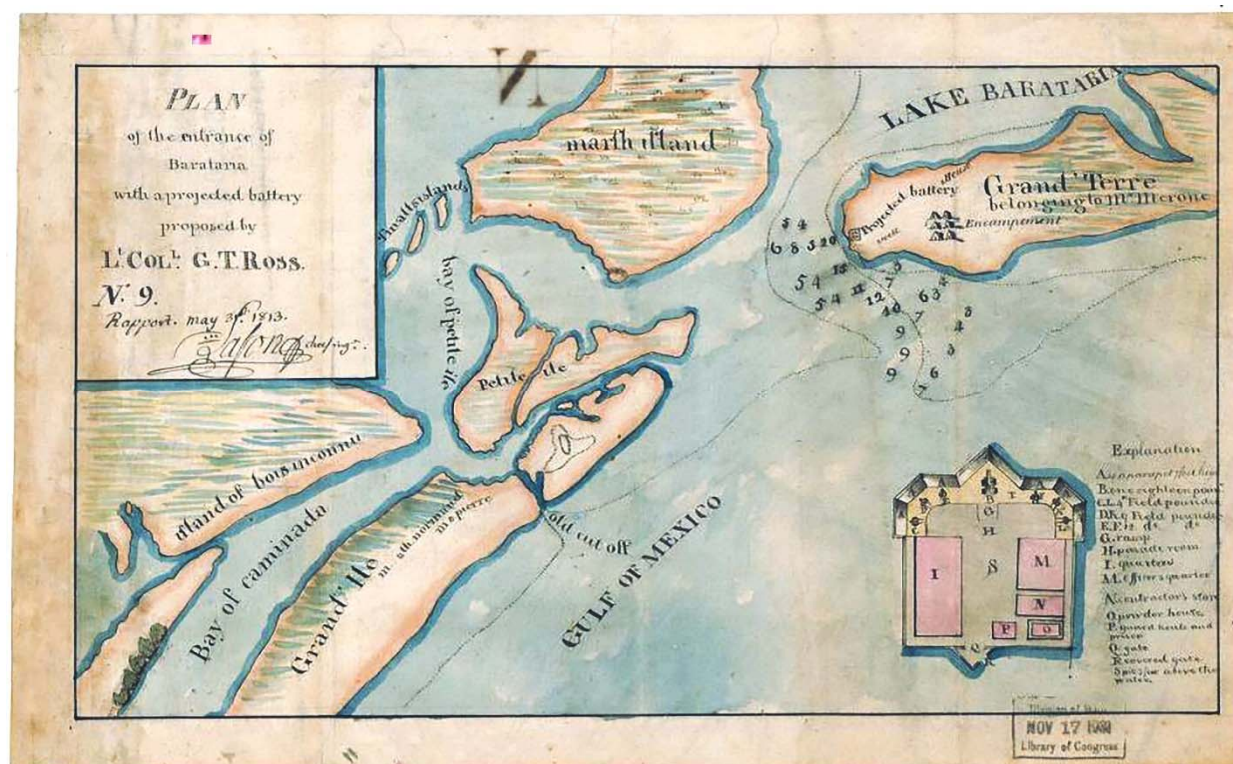


Fig. 4.5. Plan of the entrance of Barataria with a projected battery proposed by Lt. Col. G.T. Ross. No. 9 Rapport May 3. 1813 (U.S. War Dept. 1813).



Fig. 4.6. *Plan of Petites Coquilles* showing location of projected battery by Lafon (U.S. War Dept. 1813).

Lafon Maps New Orleans

In 1804, Lafon resurveyed private land claims issued by France and Spain. These records had been destroyed in the great city fires of 1788 and 1794. Lafon conducted numerous surveys and created plans for private clients. An interesting property map may be found in the records of letters, petitions, and reports of the *Conseil de Ville* (Territorial Period city council). Lafon's plan shows the lot George Pollock wished to purchase from the city in 1804. He illustrates the properties and buildings in existence at the time of the survey. Lafon did not show the Ursuline Convent and the Royal Hospital on his map. The larger building on the map is an old military barracks, measure 56 by 225 feet and has a capacity for 2000 men (Fig. 4.7).

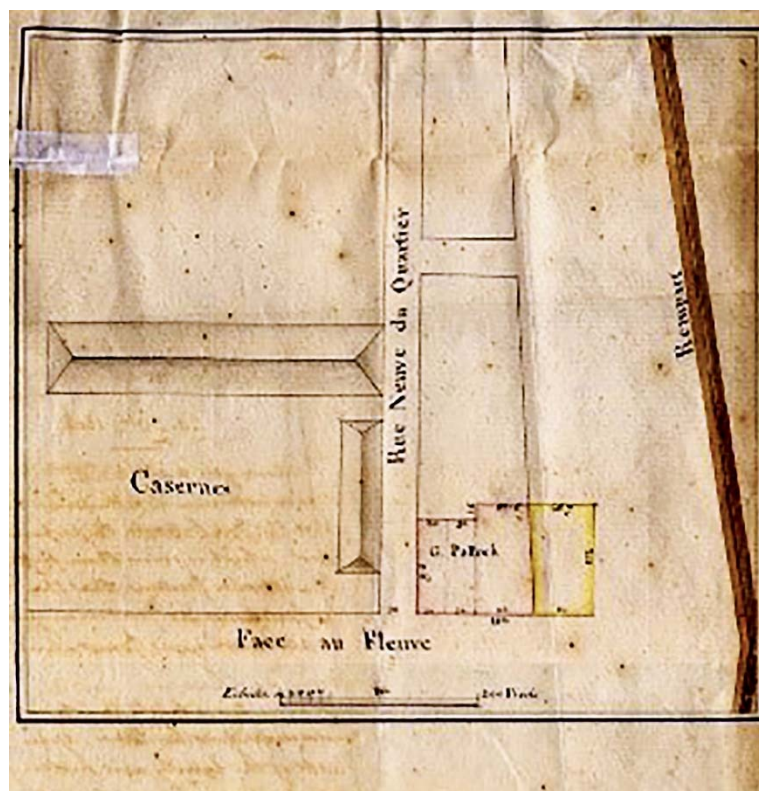


Fig. 4.7. Map for George Pollock's petition to purchase a lot at the corner of *Rue de quartier* (Barracks Street) and *Rue de levee* (Decatur Street: Lafon 1804. Conseil de Ville: Letters, Petitions and Reports, #531).

Lafon Applies for a Federal Job.

Over several years during the Territorial Period, Lafon solicited President Thomas Jefferson and others for a higher position within the Federal government. It appears that in 1805 Lafon had learned that Isaac T. Briggs, Surveyor General for the Southern District of Louisiana was to be replaced. Briggs served between 1804 and 1807. On April 11, 1805, Lafon wrote to Jefferson to request the job of Surveyor General. In early 1804 Lafon had been appointed as acting Deputy Surveyor for the Southern District of Louisiana, which included the County of Orleans and its surrounds. This was apparently considered a lower-level local position. As part of that job he conducted hundreds of surveys and *proces verbals* in New Orleans and in southern Louisiana, some as far away as Bayou Teche, Galvez Town, and Pointe Coupée Parish. He held this position between early 1804 and 1812. However, it is clear that he wished to

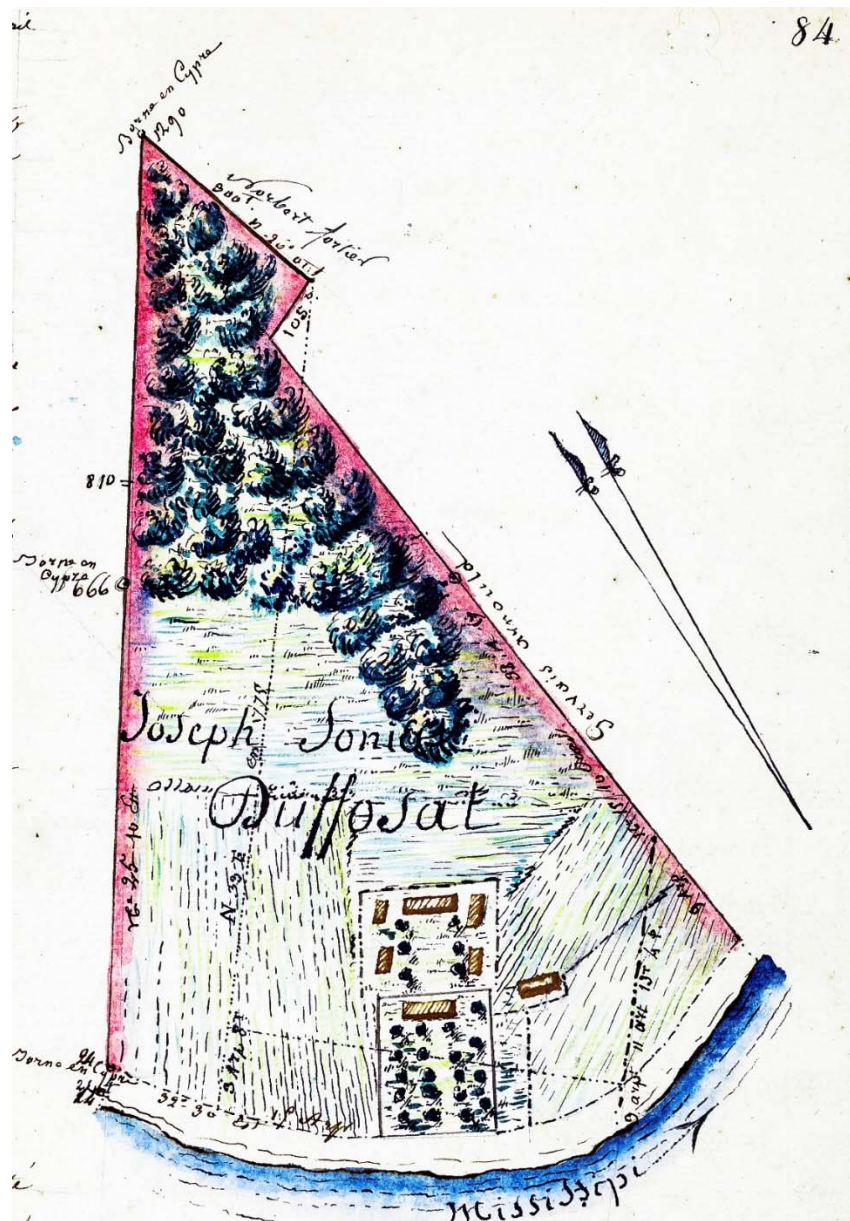


Fig. 4.9. The plantation of Joseph Soniat Duffosat, located at 12 Mile Point in Harahan, Jefferson Parish, (Tchapotoulas), “ $4\frac{1}{4}$ Lieues (leagues) above New Orleans.” Surveyed April 15, 1819, updated from January 1805. “I have directed my graphometre to North 54 degrees East as a variation” (Edwards and Fandrich 2018, Vols, I and II: 84-85). The drawing is the work of Lafon. The graphic survey is accompanied by an elaborate *proces verbal*, taken in the presence of the adjacent neighbors. The locations of the survey stakes (*bornes*) are indicated. The plantation buildings are arranged much in the form of a Norman open court farmstead with an alley of oaks leading to the river.

In his first letter to President Jefferson, Lafon stated that he had lived in Louisiana for the past fifteen years, and had had the good fortune of being able to research the local geography in depth for ten years. In other words, he was promoting his vast and intimate knowledge of the local terrain and that this expertise would be an asset for this position. He said, that Jefferson may not know of his moral and physical qualities but he could call upon any and all of the honorable people of New Orleans, including the Governor and the members of the Legislative Council for references who could all vouch for him as the creator of the well-known recent map of the Territory of Orleans, '*la Carte du Territoire d'Orléans*,' which was apparently an enormous achievement that, Lafon thought, spoke for itself. He added that he was fluent in Spanish and English, the former being a necessary prerequisite for the job of Surveyor General which requires the officer to be able to verify property titles that have been recorded in Spanish over the past forty years.

[...] La protection que vous accordez aux Arts, les faveurs que vous prodiguez aux Artistes, l'encouragement que vous donnez aux talents, sont les motifs principaux qui m'ont déterminé. Habitant de puis quinze ans la Louisiane, où je n'apportai pour toute fortune que dix ans d'étude, je me suis constamment adonné aux génies, et à l'étude du Pays. [...] Mes qualités morales et physiques ne vous sont point connues; mais s'il est nécessaire d'informations, je prendrai la liberté de vous citer toutes les personnes honorables de la Nouvelle-Orléans, Messieurs le Gouverneur, les Membres du Conseil Législatif, par ordre desquels je viens de dresser la Carte du Territoire d'Orléans, sur une échelle de huit pouces par degré; [...] je connais les langues Espagnole et Anglaise, la première devenant indispensablement nécessaire à un Arpentier général, la vérification des titres, tous faits en Espagnol depuis quarante ans [...] (Lafon, 1805).

Despite the encouraging letter Lafon wrote, Jefferson nominated a well-known land surveyor from Connecticut, Seth Pease, for the position (Jefferson 1805). Pease had successfully surveyed and subdivided the vast Western Reserve lands in Ohio. He agreed to become the Surveyor General of the Mississippi and Orleans Territory position 1806 - 1810 (Bedini 2006, Part 2: 5).²

A letter from Thomas Jefferson to Caspar Wistar in February 1807, made it clear why he never would appoint Lafon, a Frenchman, to a higher federal office. Jefferson preferred Americans and not “foreigners”.

[...] I have considered as important in making appointments. The foreigners, who come to reside in this country, bring with them an almost universal expectation of office. I receive more applications from them than would fill all the offices of the US. Yet whether we consider the natural rights of the native citizen, [...] the trusts of every country are safest in its native citizens [...] (Jefferson, 1807).

In July 1808, Lafon wrote Thomas Jefferson again to promote himself as a scientific expert, [...] Natural philosophy, Geography, Astronomy and natural history divide my leisure [...], and to emphasize his talent, he sent him a copy of his recent *Annuaire louisianais*, 1808, an Almanac Lafon wrote. It included nearly four hundred “individuals” (entries) “drawn after nature.” He wrote in English and signed his appeal to a (fellow) distinguished philosopher and a learned administrator (Lafon 1808; Fig. 4.10). Jefferson did not respond to *Lafon’s* requests for support until August 1808. He thanked him for his scientific work on time equations, places of the sun and planets, and the describing of Orleans boundaries, and if he is still interested in this type of philosophy during his retirement, he will make inquiries (Jefferson 1808). This time, Lafon’s letter was in English, indicated that he had learned the language well.

Ser.

1808
July 13

I have the honor to send you the Louisiana Annuary edited by me - I wish it may please you. I have indeavoured to reunite in this Ephemerian work all that could give an idea of the territory of Orleans - I have particularly tried to give a full account of its climate and of diseases peculiar to it - you will find in the preambule, numerous daily observations made by me. Which being in an interrupted series, with, I think, contribute to fix your opinion upon this Country. Natural philosophy, Geography, Astronomy and natural history divide my Leisure and could I, in some of these branches, be of my advantage to you, you may dispose of my portfolio, Which is, I presume, as complete as any, in what relates here to those Sciences - it contains nearly 400 individuals drawn after nature, by myself. If, amongst your public occupations you spare moments to cultivate Sciences and art; your correspondences would be very precious to me.

Receive the marks of esteem and consideration due to a distinguished philosopher and learned administrator.

Your most obedient and
devoted servant
Lafon

The 13th July 1808.

Fig. 4.10. Lafon to T. Jefferson, July 13, 1808.

Lafon as City Planner

Beginning in 1806, Lafon was hired by Bernard de Marigny to survey and lay out the streets and the lots of Faubourg Marigny, according to a plan developed by Nicolas de Finiels for Bernard de Marigny. The first section of this faubourg lay between Esplanade and Franklin Avenues. This area later became the first unit of Faubourg Marigny. The squares had nearly the same arrangement engineer and cartographer Adrien de Pauger had introduced for New Orleans in the 1720s. Namely, five lots facing the street parallel to the river, the lots in the center facing the side streets followed by another set of five lots facing the lake. Each lot was 60 feet wide by 120 feet except the center lots, which in Marigny were 50 by 150 feet. Nicolás de Finiels was a French engineer and employed for many years by the Spanish government of Manuel Gayoso de Lemos. After 1798 he drew plans of Baton Rouge and New Orleans (Fig. 4.11). He also worked repairing levees, and planning fortifications (Holmes 2010).

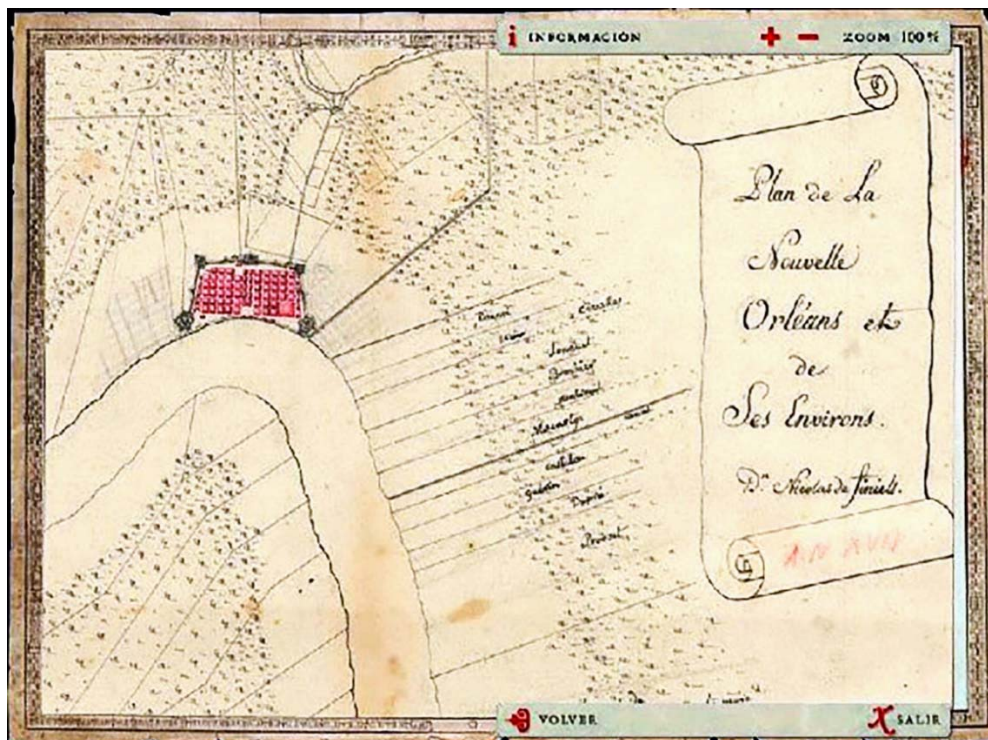


Fig. 4.11. Plan de la Nouvelle Orleans et de les environs (Finiels, ca. 1803).

On November 8, 1806, before the notary Narcisse Broutin, Marigny contracted with the engineer Barthelemy Lafon to lay out the streets in accordance with Finiels' plan. Lafon was obligated to set boundary markers at the corners of all the squares and to lay out all the lots.... And to pay him for all the said operations the sum of seven hundred dollars” (quote of Finiels, (Friends of the Cabildo, Vol. IV, 9).

Although the work was specified to be completed by the end of February, 1807, it was not until May 25, 1813, that the contract was formally accepted. Lafon acknowledging the \$700 payment and Marigny recognizing that the work had “been executed by the said Sieur B. Lafon to his entire satisfaction.”

Lafon lays out a Classical-Inspired Suburb -- the Lower Garden District

The Jesuit Order was ejected from the Louisiana colony in 1763, following France's loss to Great Britain in the French and Indian War. The Jesuits had owned a twenty-five arpent concession on the river above New Orleans in what is now the Garden District. That was a plantation-sized block of land about 4,796 feet in length along the riverbank. No sooner were they expelled, than their land was subdivided into six strips and sold at a public auction to different owners in 1763. Thereafter most of the long-lots passed to new owners via sale or through family inheritances. In 1807, the widow Silvestre Delord Sarpy, the mistress Marguerite Foucher, wished to subdivide and sell her portion of the former Jesuit lands. She hired Lafon to provide a plan, but even as he finished it, she soon sold her entire holding to Armand Duplantier of Baton Rouge. In 1810, the Creole style plantation house on this property was used by General James Wilkinson's as his headquarters (Friends of the Cabildo 1991: 8). Duplantier also hired Lafon to provide a second plan for the subdivision of the seven arpent block of land into a new subdivision, but this time Lafon approached the problem like no other developer before him. Lafon's creativity has been nicely captured by Roulhac Toledano in her *National Trust Guide to New Orleans* (1996: 109-111).

Lafon provided Duplantier with a plan which was useful and attractive, not only to him, but also to the other landholders who owned former Jesuit tracts directly above his. In other words, Lafon's

suburban plan could be simply extended into the neighboring long lots, expanding the size of the faubourg without any change in its character (Edwards and Kariouk 2004:129). Lafon was clearly inspired by classical models. He subdivided the lands into residential lots mixed together with public squares and other amenities designed to hold fountains, a prytaneum (classics school), churches, a pleasure garden, parks, markets, and other attractions. Lafon paid close attention to the flow of water through the subdivision, laying out tree-lined canals, basins and ponds which were both functional for drainage and beautifully landscaped. He included the Place du Tivoli, now known as Lee Circle, encircled first by the Tivoli Canal and later by a paved street (Douglas, 2011). He named the streets after Greek gods (Apollo, Bacchus, Hercules), the wood nymphs of Greek mythology (Naiades, Dryades), and the muses (Clio, Erato, Euterpe, Thalia). Because the river curved at this point, Lafon employed a number of different shapes for his “squares” or blocks. For most domestic squares he followed the plan of the military engineer Adrien De Pauger (1721), who laid out the squares of the French Quarter with twelve sixty foot wide terrains (lots) each, five facing the river, five facing the lake, and two key lots between these facing uptown and downtown (Fig. 4.20). Other *ilôts* (blocks – literally “islands”) were of different shapes. Many had central fountains and were served with canals. So attractive was Lafon’s creation that the neighboring land owners simply hired him to expand the system from Duplantier’s tract (Friends of the Cabildo (Friends of the Cabildo 1971: 6-7; Toledano 1996: 109-111). What is even more interesting, ironic even, is that it was in this very area of the city that the Greek Revival Classic style architecture of the 1820s to the 1850s flourished, though Lafon did not live to see his inspiration in full flower.

Individual structures were composed of symmetrical forms and had symmetrical decorative details, all based on classic prototypes. Invariable use of columned galleries, parterre gardens and wood fences that would have filled Lafon with pleasure had he not died in 1820 (Toledano 1996: 111; Edwards 2009).

One of the principal legacies of Lafon lies in the stamp which he put on this highly popular and famous portion of New Orleans, with its elegant villas, mansions and colorful tropical gardens. As partial payment for his services, Lafon, like others before him, received the ownership of lots in this rapidly

expanding portion of New Orleans. On a list of landholders who have not paid their quotas for levee repair in Faubourg La Course, Bart. Lafon is listed as the largest property owner, holding eleven lots and owning \$22.00 in fees (*Courier de la Louisiane*, Nov. 11-18, 2010). Other land holders in the same faubourg include Modeste Foucher, Eulalie Foucher (one lot each), and engineer Lacarrière Latour (holding three lots. Each lot owed \$2.00).

Lafon as Cartographer

Lafon produced three separate maps of Louisiana and its surroundings between 1802 and 1806. He supplied two of his earlier maps to Mayor James Pitot (1979: 88, 188; Figs. 3.13 - 4.14). Pitot wrote:

I should make a comment about the map which I attach to my Observations. It is, as to the Mississippi, superior to my other map which has yet appeared; and as for the details which it contains, I am greatly obliged to Mr. Barthélemy Lafon, architect of New Orleans, who worked steadfastly to secure the information that he gave to me [see Fig. 4.14, his map of the Mississippi and its Branches].

The map that I offer here is based on his sketches which were copied in my presence. The territories through which I have passed while traveling have appeared to me to be quite accurately presented; and the omissions of topographical information, as will be seen on the outer boundaries of this map, are due to the impossibility of obtaining sketches during my travels (Pitot, 1979: 88).³

Lafon's popular 1806 map, *Carte Générale du Territoire d'Orleans* (Fig. 4.4a) was also recognized as the best of its time. "In southeastern Louisiana, the work of surveyor and architect Barthélemy Lafon and his associate Arsène la Carrière de Latour is noteworthy" (William Darby quoted in Gomez 1993: 90). But, before long Lafon's several maps had come under criticism. "His map is blank outside of southeastern Louisiana" (Gomez 1993: 90). Important details were omitted and had to be filled

in by other cartographers such as William Darby on his 1814 map, and the published John Melish map of 1815, in which Lafon's contributions were stolen and unacknowledged (Gomez 1993: 87-90; Rolston and Staunton 1999).

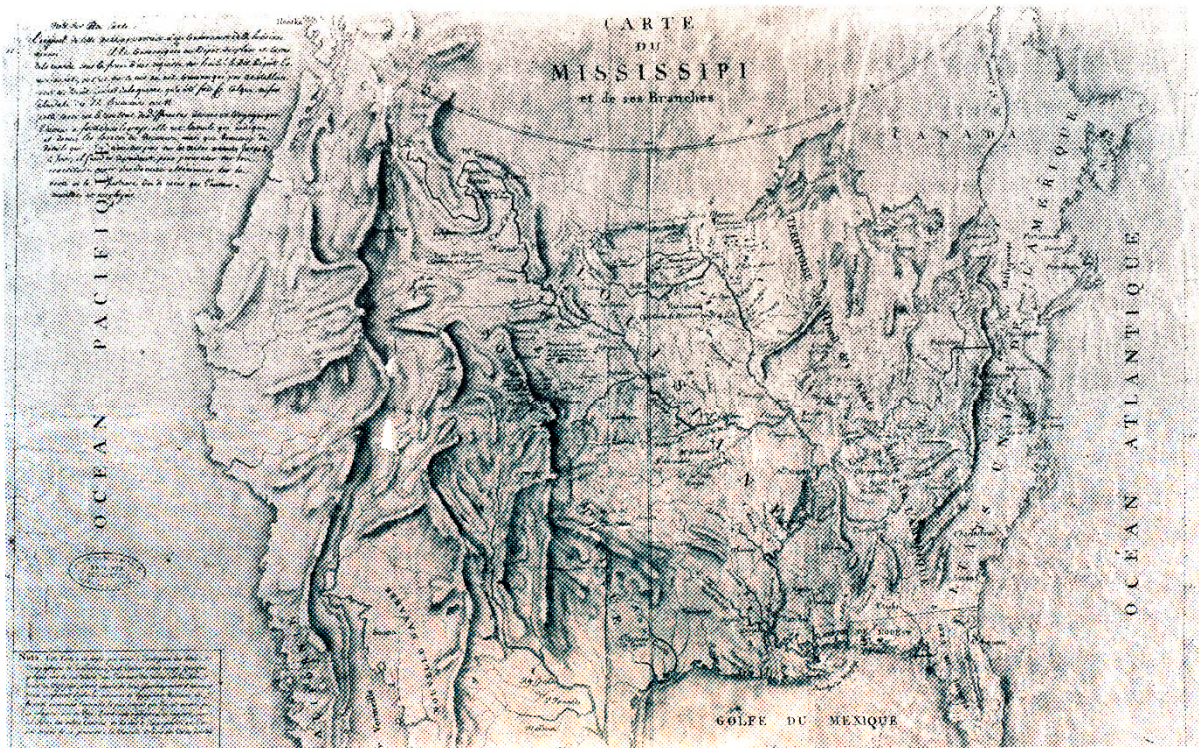
If one compares the bird's foot delta of the Mississippi River as depicted in Lafon's 1803 and 1806 maps, in comparison to the more accurate British survey by George Gauld "Plan of the Coast of Part of West Florida and Louisiana, (1771; Fig. 4.12), it appears that Lafon distorted the geography of the bird's foot delta and the swampy lands of Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes to the west of the Chandelier Islands (Figs. 4.13 - 4.14). Lafon's 1803 map was drafted in a more cavalier way in contrast to the more precise descriptions in measurements and coastlines being done by the British Admiralty (Maygarden, 1995). Naturally, the British maps were proprietary, and not available to their potential enemies: the Americans, the French, and the Spanish. Nevertheless, Lafon's 1803 map was the best done since the influential and much copied maps of Guillaume Delisle (1703, 1718), Phillip Pittman (1765) and Lieut. John Ross (1772). Consult: (Rolston and Staunton 1999; Ehrenberg 2003).



Map of a Portion of Lower Louisiana and West Florida, attributed to Barthélemy Lafon,
from Service Historique de l'Armée, Section Moderne, Vincennes

Courtesy of Photographie Giraudon, Paris

Fig. 4.13. Map of a Portion of Lower Louisiana and West Florida, attributed to Barthélemy Lafon. Ca. 1802. Service Historique de l'Armée, Section Moderne, Vincennes.



Map of the Mississippi and Its Branches, attributed to Barthélemy Lafon,
from Service Historique de l'Armée, Section Moderne, Vincennes
Courtesy of Photographie Giraudon, Paris

Fig. 4.14. *Carte du Mississippi et de ses Branches*. Barthélemy Lafon, ca. 1802. Service Historique de l'Armée, Section Moderne, Vincennes. Reproduced in Pitot 1979.

Projects Outside of the Isle of Orleans

In addition to property, land grant, city and fortification surveys and plans, Lafon mapped the Mississippi, Red, and Atchafalaya Rivers, twenty-six years before Shreve's cut-off was made. This location is some miles upstream from New Roads, in Point Coupée Parish. Lafon's map provides a valuable look at the complex river joining and provides a baseline for comparison of the movement of the channels and the sediment flow before and after the cut-off (Fig. 4.15).

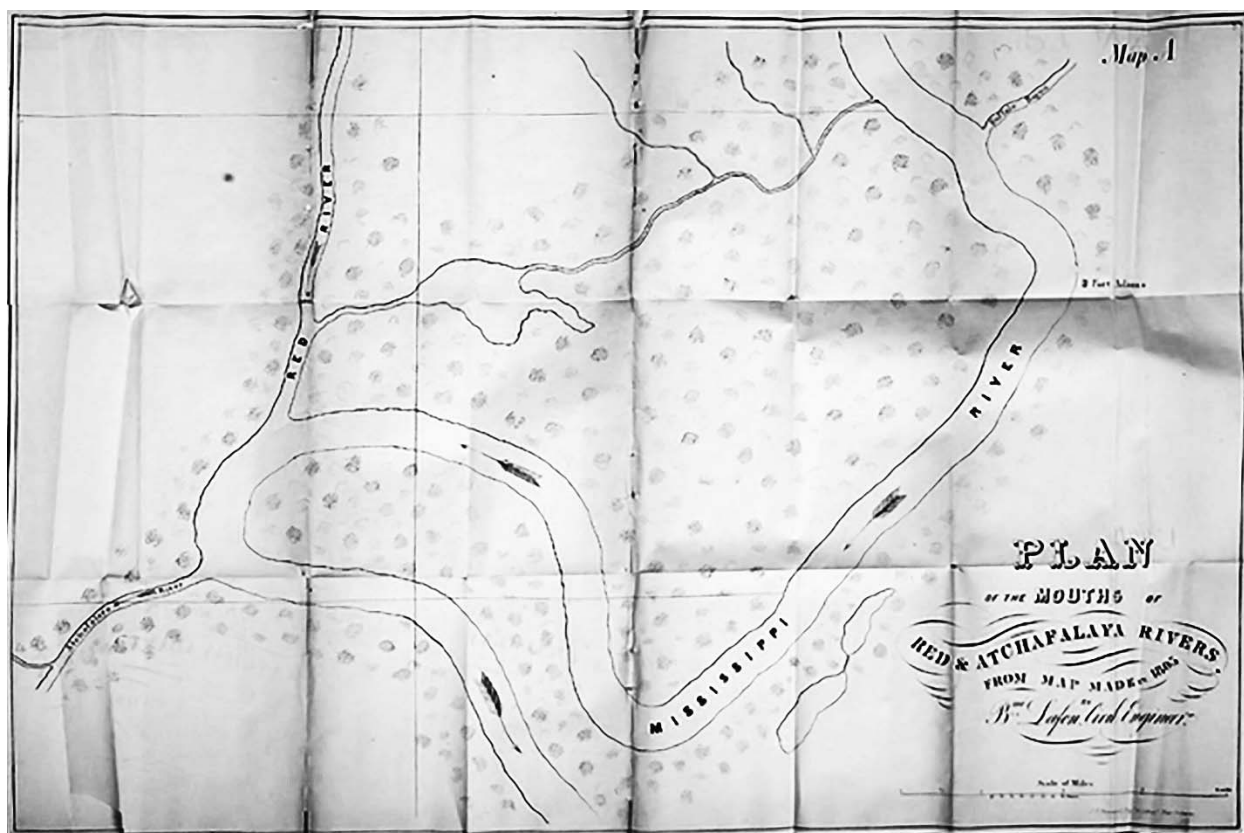


Fig. 4.15. Barthelemy Lafon Land Engineer, 1805. *Plan of the mouths of the Red and Atchafalaya Rivers.* (Louisiana Board of Public Works, 1863).

Compared to the map of George T. Dunbar, made just eight years after the cut-off, it illustrates the infilling of the bed of the old bend by the Mississippi River, the deepening of the Atchafalaya River head, and the increased velocity of its current (Fig. 4.16).

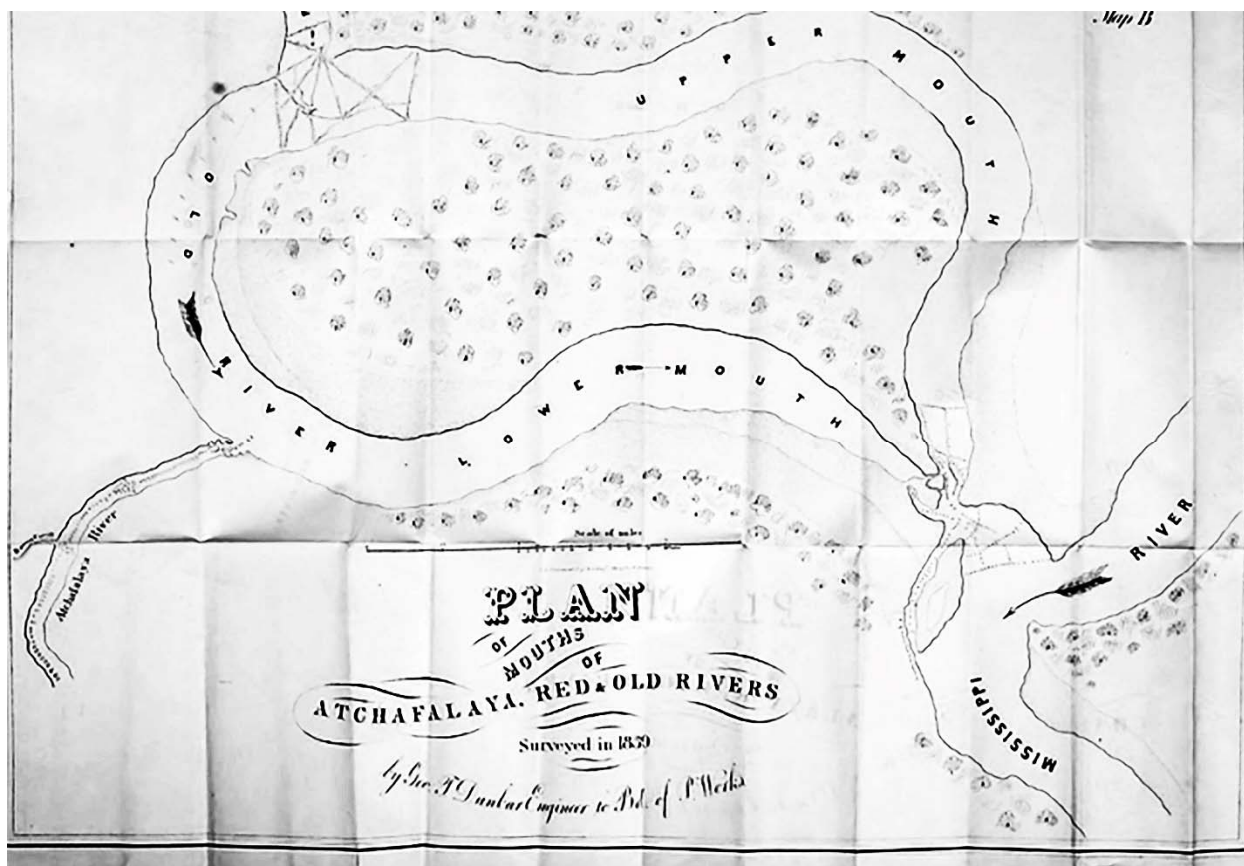


Fig. 4.16 Dunbar 1839 *Plan of Mouths of Atchafalaya, Red & Old Rivers* (Louisiana Board of Public Works, 1863).

Lafon as a Military Engineer

This topic is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6. Here, a single example of his work will suffice to provide a glimpse into the breadth of Lafon's professionalism. In January of 1806, he was commissioned as 1st Lieut., in the 2nd Regiment in the Louisiana Militia. He was later promoted to the rank of Captain. His commanding officer, 1810-1812, was General James Wilkinson. Lafon was assigned to survey and illustrate plans of the existing fortifications in lower Louisiana. The purpose was determine the conditions of these defensive points and to determine what additional measures should be taken to strengthen the. In this role, Lafon crafted two different atlases of his plans of the forts in existence in lower Louisiana before the War of 1812 (Fig. 6.1). One is simply a report on the condition twenty-six different sites,

deemed essential (Lafon 1814). The second was a report on planned modifications and expansions to a number of the same sites to be made by the U.S. Army (Figs. 4.5 – 4.6).

A second set of maps, numbered differently, was prepared in anticipation of preparations to some of the illustrated forts and military positions. In Fig. 4.17 we see a modified version of Lafon's map of the Bird's Foot Delta, including proposed "*thelegraphies lines from Balize to Plaquemines.*" What these telegraph lines consisted of is unknown, but they were probably a heliograph system using a code prior to Morse Code, which was not yet developed (U.S. War Dept. 1813).

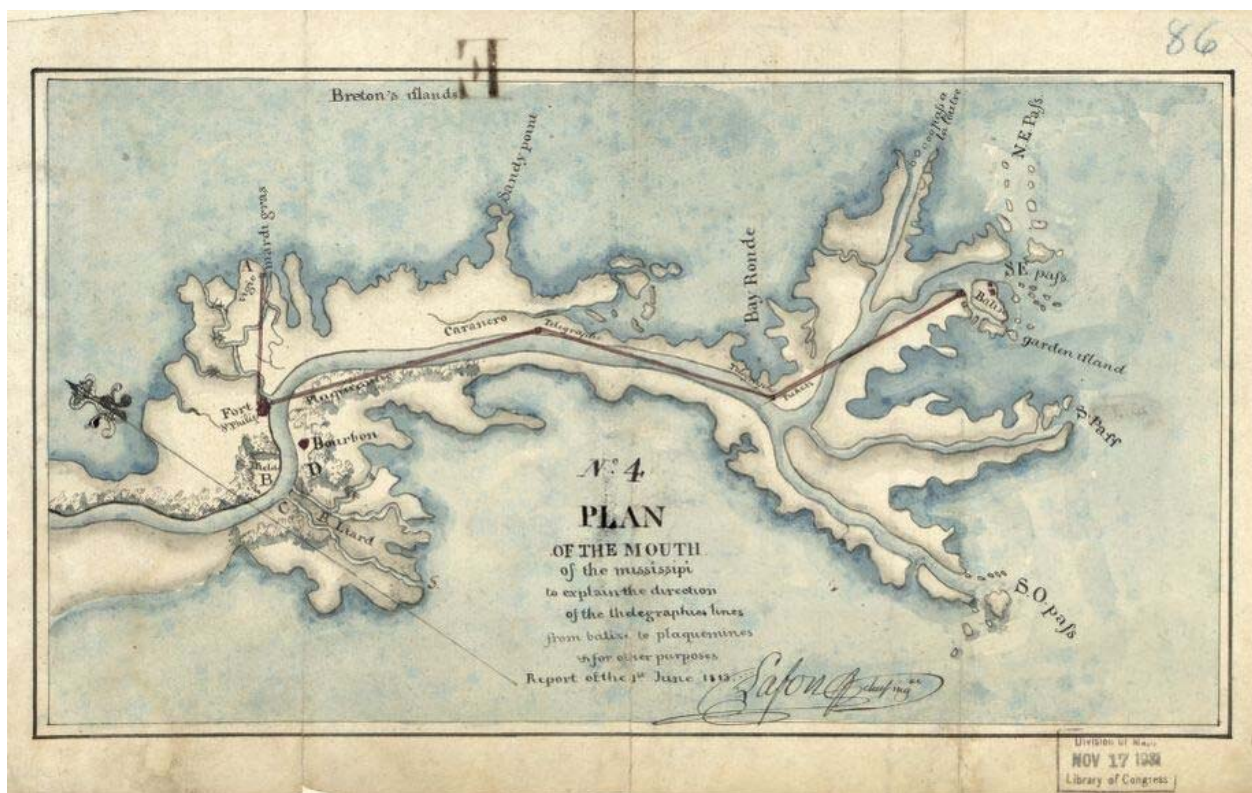


Fig. 4.17. Plan of the mouth of the Mississippi to explain the direction of the thelegraphies lines from Balize to Plaquemines & for other purposes (Lafon and United States War Department, 1813).

Patterns of Urbanization in Early 19th Century New Orleans:

So how, exactly, did Barthelemy Lafon perform his duties as Deputy Surveyor for the Territory of Orleans, and later under the State of Louisiana? What do Lafon's many newly discovered surveys tell us about the architecture of New Orleans that we have not previously appreciated (Edwards and Fandrich, 2018)? Actually, quite a lot. For example, we learn something about the ways in which the city was being filled in with buildings: In his insightful little booklet, "The Vieux Carré, A General Statement," Architectural historian Bernard Lemann stated that "By this time [1803-1825] the street elevations of the Vieux Carré had approached something like their present aspect of almost continuous closure. Only in the outlying squares were open spaces between buildings to be found."⁴ Lafon's surveys, while not providing complete coverage of the French Quarter, do provide sufficient sampling to permit generalizations. They encourage us to add specificity to Lemann's statement.

At the beginning of the American Territorial Period (1804) most squares of the interior of the Quarter were only partially filled-in. Wide spaces separated many of the houses. As Lemann states, those in the remote portions of the quarter, near to Rampart Street and Esplanade Avenue, were less-developed than those within a square or two of the river front. That "back-of-town" section of the Quarter would, in succeeding decades, be referred to as its "Quadroon Quarter." Much of it remained to be built-up. Some squares still had only a single house on them. Even in those squares within a block or two of the riverfront, open space remained on many lots in 1804.

Near the river front, many squares were now divided between the original colonial full lots of 60 (French) feet across the front (64 feet in English Measure), and post-fire half lots with 30 foot fronts (F.M.; Figs. 4.18 - 4.19). In many squares, lots have been expanded or contracted in various ways. Some were as large as, say, a lot and a half or a double lot wide (90 to 120 French Feet on the street). Others had been reduced to only 20, 25, 35 or 42 French feet in width. This was particularly true of streets such as Dauphine and Burgundy, where narrow lots with small abodes had become common. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the riverside and lakeside street fronts of most squares averaged between five and eight separate lots. The sides of the squares facing up-town or downtown had fewer lots

because they originally had in their centers only one single 60 foot wide key lot facing the street (Fig. 4.5). By 1804, some of the squares had already been so completely altered that the key lots were no longer present.

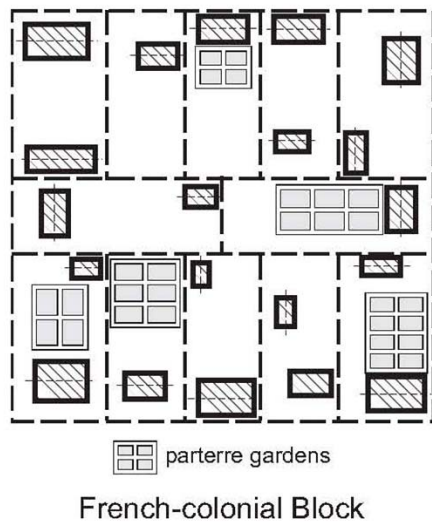


Fig. 4.18. The basic pattern of French Colonial square in New Orleans, as designed by Adrien de Pauger in 1722. Kniffen Lab Sketch by Mary Lee Eggart.

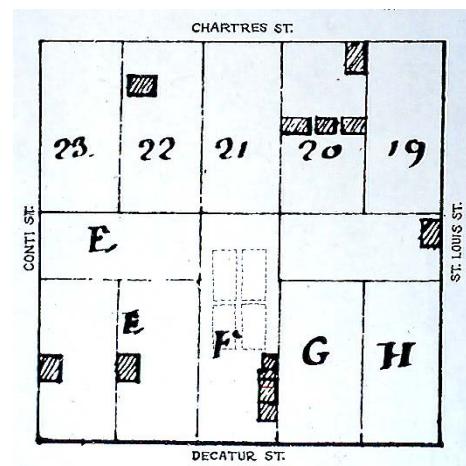


Fig. 4.19. The layout of Square 28 in the French Quarter, as drawn by Gonichon in 1728. *Terrain F* holds the House of the Engineer, de Pauger. His lot is expanded by an extra 60 feet at the expense of both key lots. Lot 23 is the location of Noël Destrehan's future Rising Sun Hotel. Image Courtesy the Library of Congress.

Scattered across the lots were buildings disposed in a number of different patterns. In a many cases buildings were crowded together at the front of the property. This is the post-fire configuration which Lemann describes. However, in 1804, the majority of the squares held houses separated from one-another. The distances between them were the result of different factors. Some of the properties were considerably wider than the buildings the held, leaving ample space beside them. In other cases properties had no buildings upon them, leaving gaps between the built-up lots. As we see in Fig. 4.25, houses were sometimes set back as much as sixty feet from the street front.

Lemann's post-fire pattern is to be seen in Vieux Carré Square 91 (Fig. 5.1). Almost all of the houses are set right up at the street, However, in some cases it appears that houses were rebuilt on their

original colonial foundations following the 1788 and even the 1794 fires (Fig. 5.13). In Square 28, for example, the Joseph Conan house at 434-436 Chartres is set precisely on the spot where a house is shown in Gonichon's 1728 map (Fig. 4.20, Lot No. 20). Square 28, surrounded by Decatur, Chartres, Conti and St. Louis Streets, has new, post-fire houses which are set back, as well as others located on the front of their lots (Fig. 4.20). This is similar to the colonial pattern depicted on the French Colonial maps by Gonichon and Caillot in 1731-32. Between 1804 and 1818, many of these open lots would experience considerable in-filling with new buildings (Figs. 4.25, 5.40). This was due to a number of factors: 1) large-scale immigration of French refugees from the Caribbean, 2) successful crystallization of sugar in 1796, and the economic boom resulting from it, leading to a building boom, and 3) the continuous influx of Americans pouring into the city, particularly at the time of the War of 1812. The city was experiencing a dramatic growth-spurt which included the doubling of its entire population in a single year due to the arrival of waves of Saint-Domingue refugees from Cuba in 1809 (Lachance 1998).

Lafon Maps New Orleans

Between 1804 and 1812, Lafon conducted numerous property surveys in New Orleans, in the Suburbs and around the fringes of the city. These surveys were conducted according to French and Spanish law. They followed a pattern in which the surveyor would be called to conduct a survey. The land owner would gather interested neighbors to insure that the survey was conducted according to the satisfaction of all. The surveyor's actions were described in detail in the document which accompanied the graphic survey (*process verbal*). These were prepared in the office, and four copies were generated. One for the Governor (archived in the city archives), one for the notary who recorded the sale or other transaction, one for the land owner, and Lafon kept one in his own office. Most, but not all of these have been preserved in the three books of surveys described above. An overview of the surveys he conducted in the French Quarter is illustrated in Fig. 4.20.

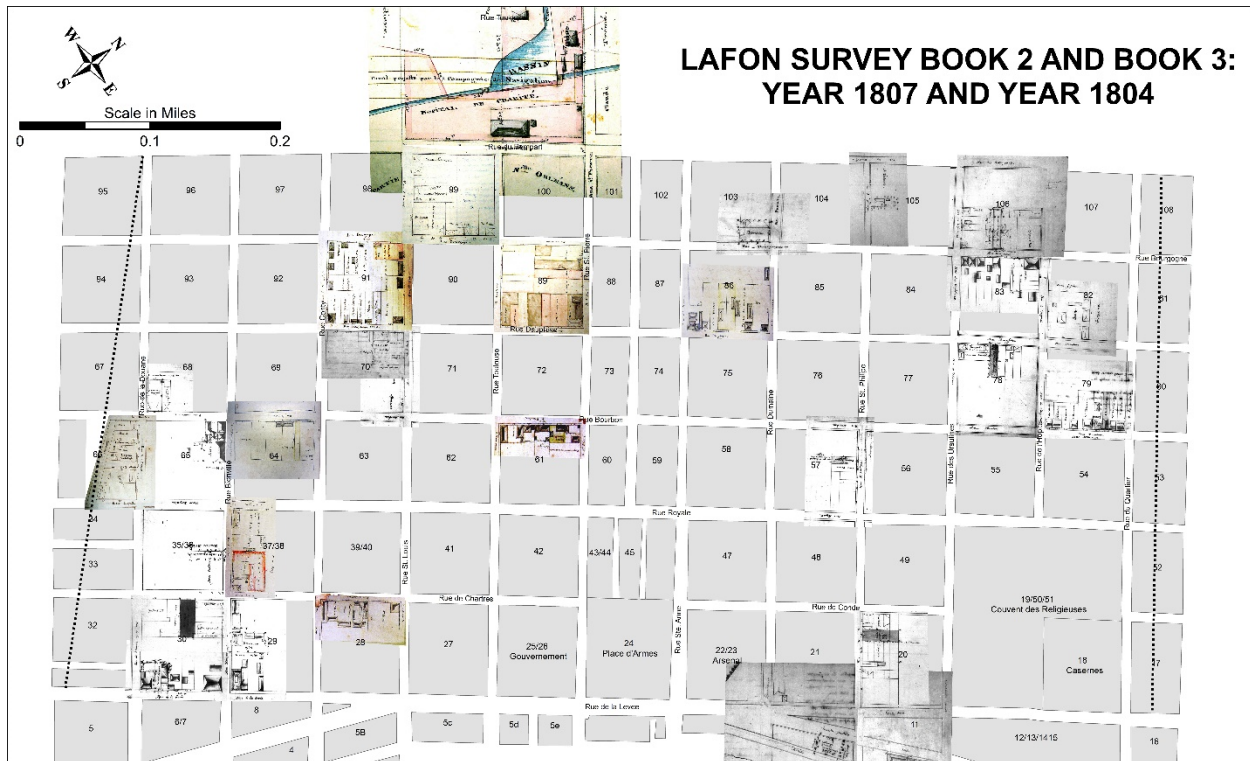


Fig. 4.20. An overview of Lafon's surveys in the Vieux Carré, 1804 - 1810. Gabriele Richardson for the Kniffen Lab, LSU.

In the year 1806, Lafon was called upon to produce a map of the entire city, by the *counsel de ville* (city government). Lafon worked on the map over several years, and finally produced the best map which had be made of the city to that date. Lafon claimed that it was based on new surveys. His map was virtually complete in 1814, and was available for use at the Battle of New Orleans. After the battle, the map was updated with information on the extent of the flood of 1816. Note how similar the flood line limit was to that of Hurricane Katrina, in 2005. After his map was printed, Lafon left the city to join Jean Laffite and other Baratarians in Galveston, Texas (Lemmon, et. al. 2003: 317).

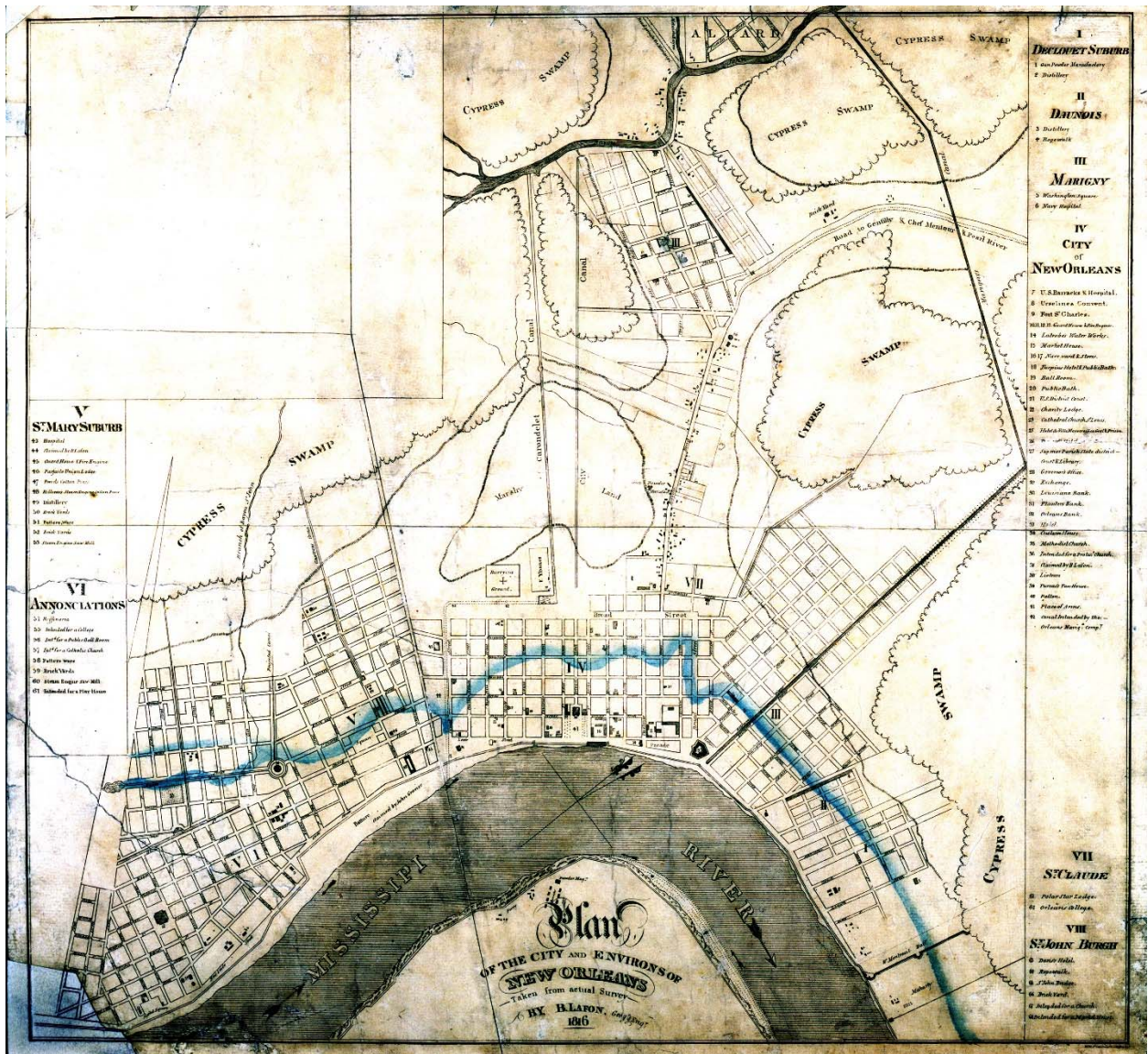


Fig. 4.21. Lafon's 1816 Plan of the City and Environs of New Orleans, 1816. HNOC.

An interesting discovery leads us to believe that an early draft of Lafon's map of New Orleans survives in the Spanish Historical Military Archives in Madrid. A copy of this map, unsigned and unlabeled opens the possibility that the map was delivered by Lafon to Spanish authorities were were known to be paying for information on the United States, perhaps through the Priest, Father Antoine Sedilla. Many aspects of this unlabeled 1806 map are essentially identical to Lafon's published 1816 map (Fig. 4.22). Of course, the city had changed dramatically in the following decade, and that is reflected in

the footprint of the city of the 1806 map. Many new streets exist, and the old fortifications have been erased. Both maps show individual properties with their buildings along the Bayou Road. This is an area in which it appears Lafon held a special interest. In the 1806 map a considerable amount of detail is devoted to the nature of Carondelet's five forts surrounding the Vieux Carré. As a military map, we hypothesize that this detailed map remained unlabeled because Lafon did not wish to have his identity revealed.

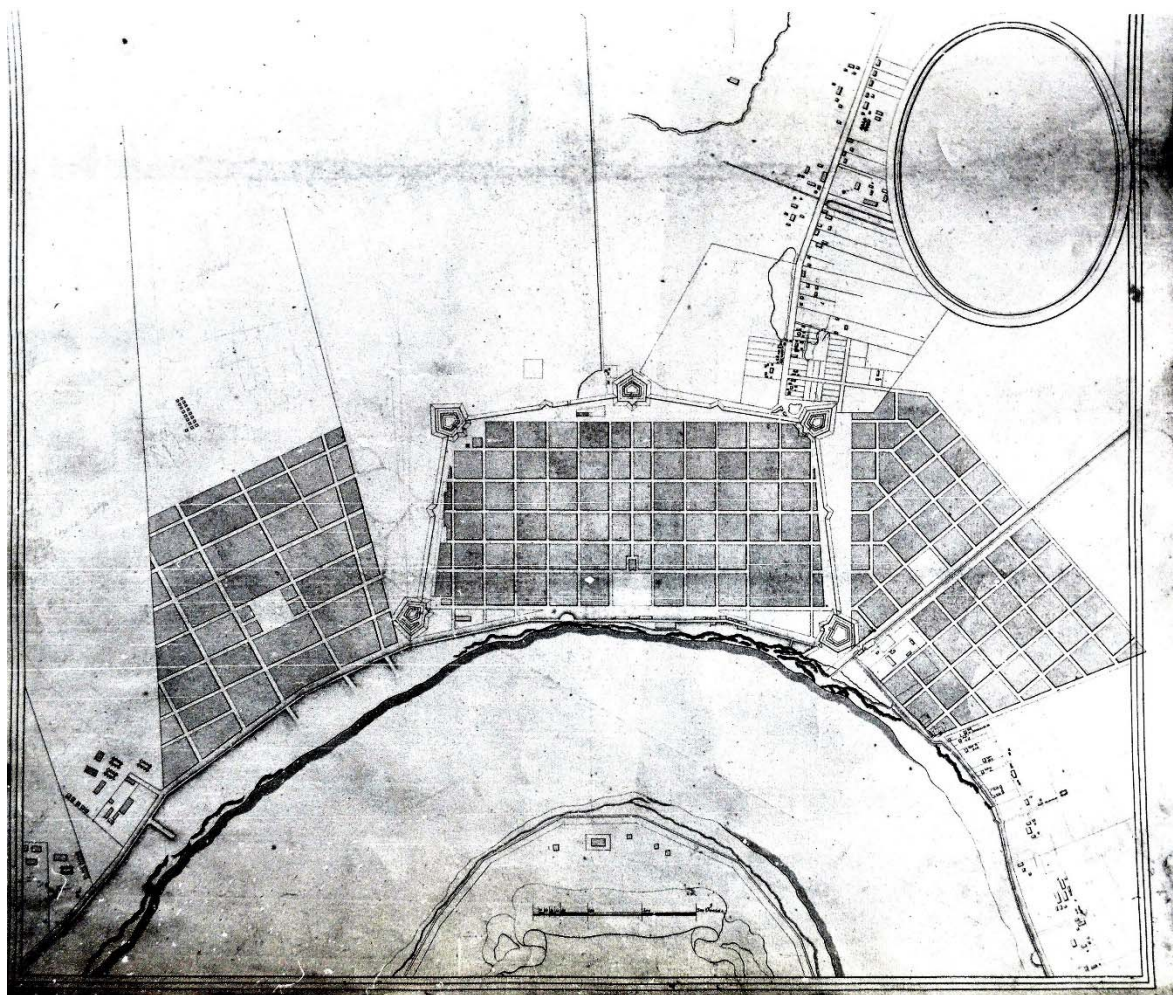


Fig. 4.22. An unlabeled map of New Orleans dated 1806, attributed to Barthelemy Lafon. This map was discovered in a Spanish military archive, and is held by the Special Collections of the LSU Library.

Lafon's Role in the Survey of a Single Vieux Carré Square.⁵

Lafon in Error

Lafon's surveying methods as applied to city lots are described in Chapter 5 (pp. 2-3 **CORRECT PP. Nos.**). Particularly in his early years as a surveyor, Lafon made numerous small mistakes in his surveys and occasional large ones. On Sept. 14, 1804, Lafon was called to survey a property of Julie Brion, f.c.l., in the 400 block of Chartres Street (now 416-418 Chartres). The property is situated in Square 28, (Fig. 4.23). In his written description, Lafon (or his office worker) loosely identifies the property as lying between Bienville and St. Louis Streets. Apparently, the writer was not yet sufficiently familiar with the street locations to identify the correct cross street (Conti), and the location of what is now the 400 block of Chartres Street. In the accompanying graphic survey, Lafon assigns to Noël Destrehan, whose property lies at the corner of Conti and Chartres, a 60 foot wide lot facing Chartres (now 400-406 Chartres Streets). In fact, Destrehan's lot was a double lot, 120 feet in width on Chartres. Lafon had measured the length of the entire square on Chartres to be 300 *pieds* (feet of Paris), divided into five equal lots. To make up for the loss of width of the Destrehan property, he incorrectly adds the missing 60 feet to the width of the lot at the other (downtown) end of the 400 block, owned by Jean Piallet. The lots of Julie Brion, Conand and Cucullu are all incorrectly relocated 60 feet uptown. Piallet's lot is expanded from 60 to 120 feet in width on Chartres.

These errors lead to other distortions. For example, the Destrehan rooming house at the corner of Chartres and Conti is rendered far too narrow, as Lafon had to squeeze it onto a lot only half its actual width (compare Figs. 4.23 and 4.24). These errors in property widths would be corrected in another survey done by Lafon in 1818, and attached to the earlier survey (Fig. 4.25). However, there is no explanation for why such a grievous error was made in a legal document created by the authority formally empowered to make such professional surveys. Did Noël Destrehan object? Was there bad blood between Lafon and the Destrehans? Distortions such as these must be taken into account when we set out to understand Lafon's contributions to our knowledge of the architecture of early American New Orleans.

Changes in the architecture of the French Quarter, 1804 – 1818. Many of the changes occurring in the first decades of the nineteenth century are documented in Lafon's books of surveys. As an example, we may explore some of the changes which occurred in the same 400 block of Chartres Street—fairly typical of the commercial parts of the town close to Levee Street (Decatur) and to the river. If we adopt the lot numbers used by Gonichon on his 1728 French Colonial map of Square 28, then we can identify the five full colonial lots which faced Chartres Street in 1804, and again in 1818 (Figs. 4.23, 4.25). The numbers run consecutively backwards from Destrehan's lot No. 23 at the corner of Conti and Chartres, to the Paillet lot No. 19 at the corner of St. Louis and Chartres (Fig. 4.20).

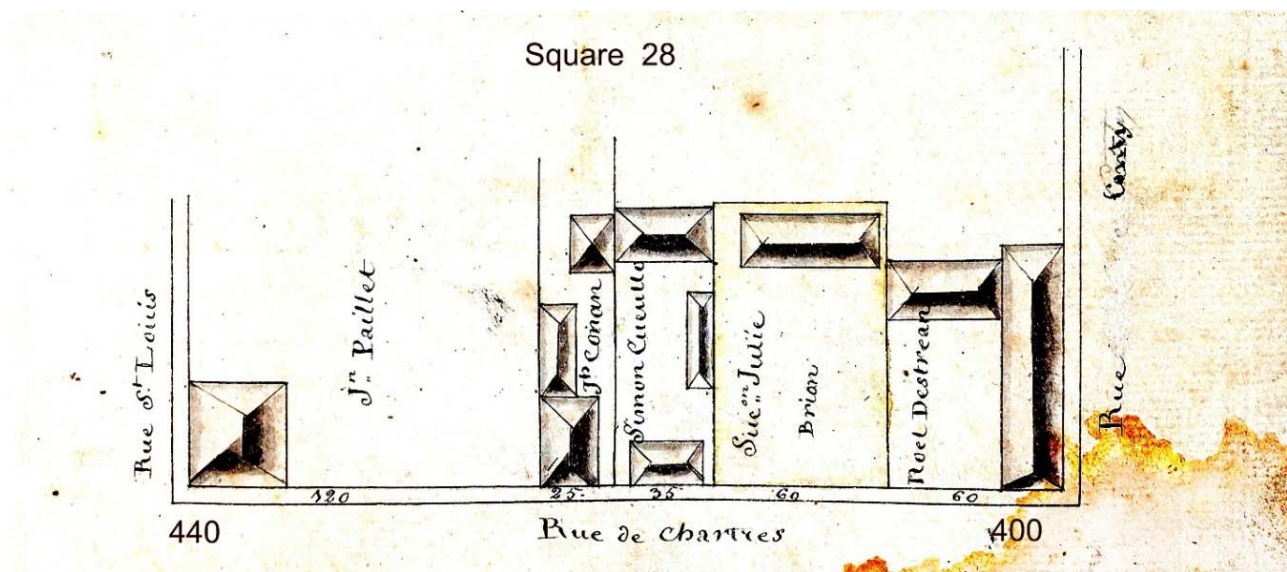


Fig. 4.23. Page 52 of the Lafon Survey Book No. 3. The buildings along the lake side of Square 28, in the 400 block of Chartres Street, as surveyed in 1804. The river is towards the top. This is Square number and modern street numbers added by this editor. The future Rising Sun Hotel building at the corner of Conti and Chartres, and its lot, were actually twice the width shown.

Architecturally and socially, Square 28 was one of the more important squares in the city. Information on the changes can be traced through several kinds of documents, including inventories, acts of transfer, and plans drawn by surveyors. On the Chartres Street (lakeside) of Square 28, detailed plans were made in 1804 (Lafon), 1818 (Lafon), 1825 (Pilie), and 1876 (Sanborn). Plans continued to be created roughly every decade or so after 1876 by the Sanborn Insurance Company. Thus, thanks to the surveys in the present volume, we can watch the transformations of this square as the buildings on it changed from the earliest years of the nineteenth century through its end.

French Colonial Lot No. 23: The old house on the corner of Chartres and Conti (400-408 Chartres) was renowned in American folklore. It was constructed following the great fire of 1794, and was there in 1804 when Lafon surveyed it with drastically incorrect measurements. The Destrehan House sat at the location of a series of earlier houses owned by the Mandevilles and other interrelated Creole first families of French colonial New Orleans since 1728. At the time of Lafon's 1804 survey, it was owned by Jean Noël Destrehan. The building was described as a two-story brick-between-posts house measuring 45 feet on Chartres by 75 feet on Conti. It contained three apartments above, four below and a cabinet-loggia gallery in the rear. After 1796 it functioned as a boarding house run by Margaret Clark Chabot. Jean Noël Destrehan acquired the house in 1802 (P. Pedesclaux 3/12/1802, COB 40/178). It would, in the 1810s and 1820s, come to be known as the "Rising Sun Hotel"—its infamy spread nation-wide through a still well-known folk song.⁶ Descriptions are found in legal documents including the inventory of Widow Mme. Destrehan's properties:

A building in brick of [2] stories, fronting on Chartres Street, and [in the rear of the lot] kitchens of brick and of stories" (refer to Figs. 4.23 - 4.25).

Another edifice brick-built fronting Chartres Street having three rooms upstairs and three rooms or stores below, and another brick [kitchen] building in the yard [behind] having four rooms upstairs and four rooms on the ground floor...” (Fig. 4.25). This entry also refers to the house at 410-414 Chartres Street, now the Williams Research Center.

After Destrehan’s death the double lot passed to his widow, Celeste Robin de Longy Destrehan, who eventually sold it to François Marie Perrilliat. Mme. Destrehan died in 1824, leaving this important inventory of the buildings on Chartres Street. The old boarding house/hotel was demolished ca. 1825 and replaced with the present 7-bay wide Destrehan-Perriliat House built by Gurlie and Guillot for Mr. Perrilliat. It appears to have been built much in the same style as its predecessor, with arched openings below matched by rectangular openings above which opened onto a narrow balcony. It was recently renovated and now functions as offices, meeting rooms, and a gallery for the Historic New Orleans Collection (Figs. 4.24 - 4.26).



Fig. 4.24. The Destrehan-Perriliat store house as expanded ca. 1825 and recently renovated by the Historic New Orleans Collection. Conti Street is to the right.

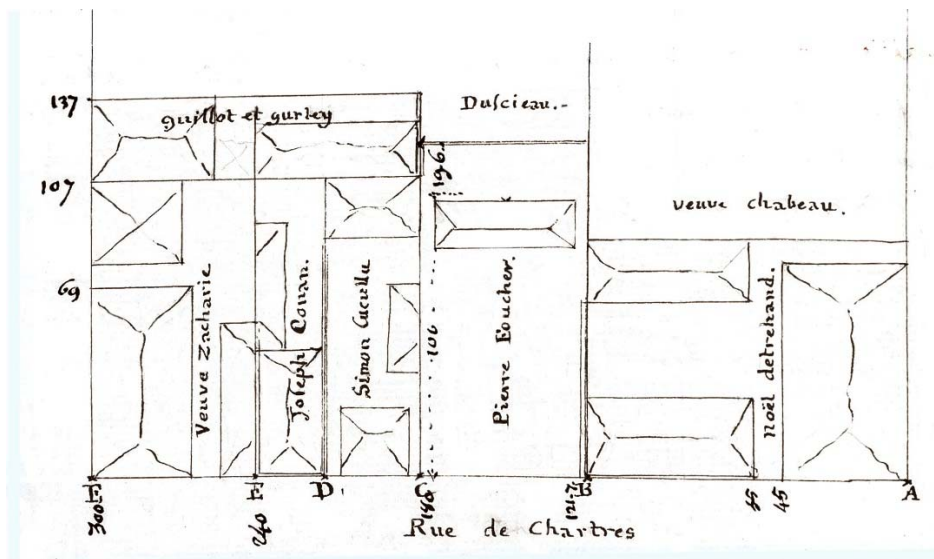


Fig. 4.25. Lafon's resurvey of the 400 block of Chartres Street, 1818. Survey Book No. 3, p. 51½. This survey was attached to the one seen in Fig. 4.21. The erroneous lot widths have been corrected. Colonial Lot No. 19, labeled as the property of the "Widow Zacharie," was actually owned by the widow Catherine Villere Paillet. It is not known why its ownership was mislabeled by Lafon. Perhaps it was rented at the time of the survey. Note the location of the Guillot and Gurley offices. This firm built many of the structures which appear in this 1818 resurvey.

French Colonial Lot No. 22. The lot which sat beside the Rising Sun Hotel on the Destrehan property was a second full lot, described in the inventory above as having a two-story structure set back from the street with four rooms above and four below. Sometime, probably shortly after Lafon's 1804 survey, Destrehan had a storehouse built directly in front of this back building at what today would be numbered 410-414 Chartres. This was a low two-story brick building which appears on both Lafon's 1818 survey and Pilie's 1825 survey. It is described as being 65 feet on the street and 30 feet deep. It was lower than the adjacent Destrehan house, with a simple wrought iron balcony overlooking the street. It contained three [sets of] rooms above, and three stores below. These buildings survived into the twentieth century to be photographed, before being razed in 1914 (Fig. 4.26). At that time they were replaced by the current tall two-story Second Renaissance Revival building which functioned as a criminal court building and a police station. Today it is the Williams Research Center of the Historic New Orleans Collection at 410 Chartres Street (Fig. 4.27).

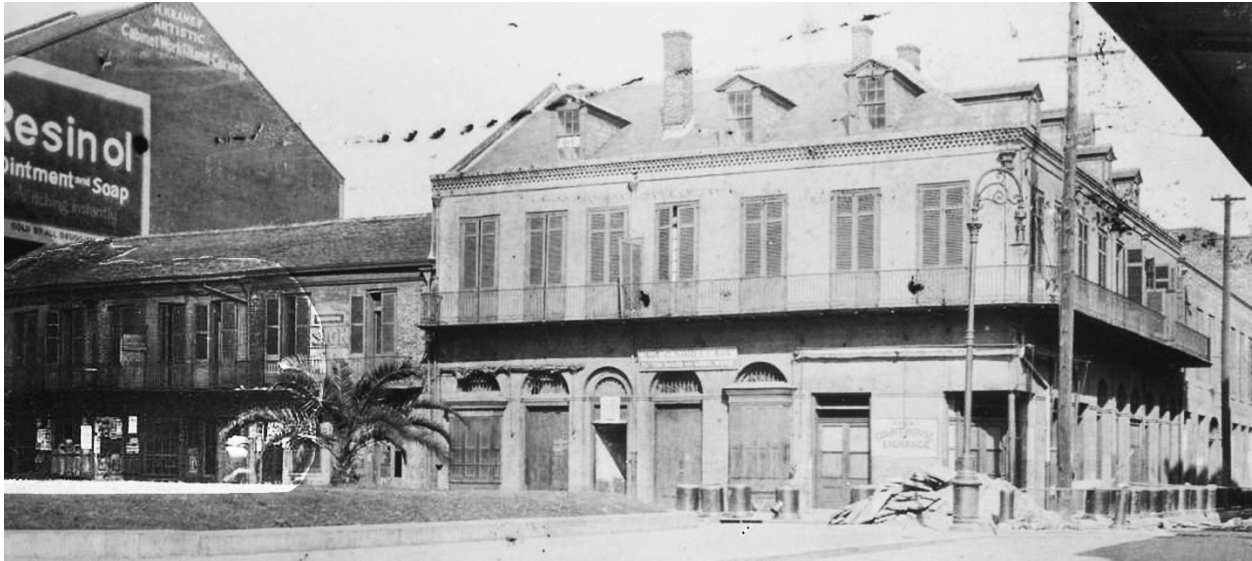


Fig. 4.26. Two buildings on the Noel Destrehan double lot at the corner of Chartres and Conti. The building on the corner is the Destrehan-Perrilliat House, as seen in 1910. It was constructed ca. 1825. Beside it on Colonial Lot 22 is the low storehouse built by Destrehan ca. 1805. That building was demolished in 1914 and replaced by the building seen in Fig. 4.11. Photo courtesy Special Collections, Tulane University Libraries.



Fig. 4.27. The ca. 1915 Second Renaissance Revival building at 410-414 Chartres Street. This building replaced Destrehan's store house and functions today as the Williams Research Center of the Historic New Orleans Collection. JDE Photo, 2014.

French Colonial Lot No. 21. Next down Chartres Street stood the full lot of Julie Brion, f.c.l. (free woman of color). The lot was set in the middle of the block at what today would be 416 – 422 Chartres Street. The property now holds Chef John Folse’s poplar K-Paul’s restaurant. In 1804, Julie Brion had a house “of stories” here, set back about 80 feet from the street in old French colonial style. Her house measured about 55 feet wide by about 20 feet deep, with a rear gallery. Julie was an educated and enterprising woman and, like many of her free colored sisters, an entrepreneur. As we have seen, she had acquired several properties in the Quarter. She was also, in a sense, a relative of Barthelemy Lafon, being related to Julie’s family via Lafon’s *placée* (long term companion). Julie had acquired her Chartres Street property before 1786 -- before the two great fires. When she died in 1804, Lafon was called to conduct an official property survey for her estate. That resulted in the flawed survey depicted in Fig. 4.23. Julie’s lot was inherited by her daughter, Modeste Foucher, also a Free Woman of Color. Modeste was related by marriage to Pierre Foucher of a wealthy and prominent Creole colonial family, and he acquired Julie’s lot on Chartres Street. In 1834 the property was developed by Philippe Auguste Delachaise. There, three separate 4-story store houses of no particular architectural merit were erected. They were fronted with granite columns on the ground floors, as was the custom of the period for commercial buildings. Around the beginning of the Twentieth Century, these buildings were reduced to three and then two stories. In the mid Twentieth Century the stores at 416 and 418 Chartres were combined and renovated to become K-Paul’s Restaurant, a 6-bay two story structure with a front balcony over the sidewalk (Fig. 4.28). Only the third 1834 building survives at 422 Chartres. Today it is a two story, 3-bay brick townhouse much changed from its original form (Fig. 4.29).



Fig. 4.28. K-Paul's Restaurant at 416-418 Chartres Street. This building rests on the former house lot of Julie Brion, f.c.l. and entrepreneur in the late Spanish colonial period. JDE photo, 2014.



Fig. 4.29. 422 Chartres Street -- the last survivor of the three (much changed) 3-bay commercial buildings which were constructed on the lot of Julie Brion in 1834. JDE Photo, 2014.

French Colonial Lot 20. In the year of the Louisiana Purchase, 1803, this full colonial lot was divided unequally into two properties. The first was that of Simon Cucullu, at 424-428 Chartres Street. The lot measured 35 feet on the street by either 103 feet (F.M.), or by 108 feet deep (F.M.), according to different acts. Cucullu, a prominent merchant, acquired the lot the year before Lafon's first survey. There, he constructed several houses. In an 1834 inventory they were described as: "a three story brick house, covered with slates [on the street], a kitchen and stores three stories high; and [in back] a one story bakery house covered in terrace [meaning in this case, I believe, covered with an *appentis* shed roof at a low pitch], the whole in brick. The bakery was known as Mr. Bouny's Bakery, valued at \$30,000." (Inventory from the succession papers of Simon Cucullu, 10/15/1833 and 6/7/1834; the Pilie map of 3/27/1834, attached to Felix Grima, N/P. 9/13/1836). These buildings all appear to have been present by the time of Lafon's 1804 survey (Fig. 4.23).

The small, elegant store house at 430-432 Chartres, sat on the remainder of the Full French colonial lot No. 20. It measured only 25 feet wide on the street. In 1803, this *demi-terrain* was acquired by Joseph Conand, a prominent physician and wealthy land-owner. There he built a house with an attached rear extension and a separate building, probably a kitchen, at the rear of the 108 foot deep lot. There seems to be no good description of this old house, but it may be shown on a plan of three properties at the corner of St. Louis and Chartres, drawn by Etienne Pedesclaux for a sale from Thereze Jourdan to Joseph Pesson, May 31, 1831, and attached to the act of [probably] Pierre Pedesclaux N.P., COB 8/518. Clearly, it was demolished and replaced by a commercial building, in the mid nineteenth century. In 1966 the two separate half-lots were reunited. The existing buildings were raised and a full 60 foot wide commercial building was built for the Whitney National Bank in the local Creole neoclassical style of the 1820s.

French Colonial Lot 19: The small, elegant store house at 434-36 Chartres was built by the widow of Jean Paillet for members of his family. Paillet died in 1808, leaving the full lot on the corner of St. Louis

Street to his widow. The house which stands at 434-436 Chartres today was probably constructed by in-laws Gurlie and Guillot about 1810. Claude Gurlie and Joseph Guillot were married to two sisters who were probably nieces of the Paillets. The house does not appear on Lafon's 1804 survey, but that survey is so flawed that it may simply have been left out. In Lafon's 1818 survey, an *apenti*-roofed structure is shown in this location. That may or may not be the entresol storehouse structure built by Mme. Catherine Villere. Luckily, it is extant (Fig. 4.30). Like most of the other buildings built here in the first decade of the nineteenth century, this small two-story house has arched openings facing the street, with rectangular openings directly above.



Fig. 4.30. The small entresol house of the family of Jean Paillet, located at 434-36 Chartres Street. When Paillet died in 1808, the lot passed to his widow, who probably built this house ca. 1810. The house was almost certainly built by Joseph Guillot and Claude Gurlie, relatives by marriage to Jean Paillet. Their offices lay directly behind this lot.

At the corner of St. Louis Street and 440 Chartres, stands a larger version of the Paillet family home just described. This house dates to ca. 1795, and appears on the 1804 Lafon survey. The owner was Jean Paillet of Marseilles. Besides a residence, it would be used as commercial property with warehouses and a gallery. The house, which also still stands, was used as an auction house by Joseph Le Carpentier, a tenant in 1838 (Fig. 4.31). Like other buildings in this block, it was probably built by Gurlie and Guillot, who went into business in 1795. The house is shown to be deeper along St. Louis Street in Lafon's second survey, but this possible expansion is questionable due to the suspect nature of that earlier work. Jean Paillet died in 1808, the property passing to his widow, Catherine Villere Paillet, and then, when she died in 1839, to their son, Pierre Noel Paillet. Like its neighbor separated by only a narrow alley, the house was an entresol building. Today it houses Masperos Restaurant, named for an important coffee house and exchange which, from 1814 until 1822, was located diagonally across the streets on property then owned by Gurlie and Guillot, and now occupied by the Omni Royal Orleans Hotel. Lafon's survey images are the first drawings of this historically significant building in their early nineteenth century forms (see below). In French terminology, this is a "two story brick house," but in fact an entresol level about five feet in height separates the two main floors (Fig. 4.31). More recently the original wrought iron balcony has been augmented by a full-length cast iron balcony facing Chartres Street (right side). The small Paillet family house (Fig. 4.30) is seen at the far right.



Fig. 4.31. 440 Chartres Street, the store house of the widow Jean and Catherine Paillet, built ca. 1795 - 1804. This house was probably constructed by Guillot and Gurlie, who did business from the house further down St. Louis Street (left side). Today it is called Masperos. Photo by Charles L. Franck ca. 1910—1920, courtesy the HNOG

Lafon's survey drawings of this square are important for several reasons. They illustrate the kind of architecture which dominated the commercial-oriented buildings of this neighborhood in the period of transition to America and statehood. They also show us the transformations occurring in property holdings and in architecture in the early American period. Without these surveys, we would not be able to tell the full story of this part of New Orleans. Three new buildings have been added in the fourteen years between the two Lafon surveys. Since all of the buildings seen in the 1804 survey were relatively new, postdating the 1794 fire, only one single service building has been removed (in the rear of the Conand *demi-terrain*). A new type of service building is seen in the 1818 survey. These are *appentis*, or shed-roofed structures, one of which is in the location of the Paillet family house at 434-436 Chartres. The other two are service structures placed behind the main houses. In all cases, these structures were two or three stories in height. Our suspicion is that the roofs of the structures in the Conand and Cucullu lots were also, originally *appentis*, but were not accurately recorded in the earlier flawed survey. *Combles en appentis* (shed-roofed) structures became popular following the second fire in 1794. They were used on

service structures, but also on single and double-story houses which opened directly onto the street. The house at 631 Bourbon Street, built in 1801 and still standing, is an excellent example of these popular shed-roofed buildings (Fig. 4.32). Many remain, despite the fact that they seem to be ignored almost completely by architectural historians who have commented on old New Orleans.⁷ They do not seem to be considered a type, despite their obvious geometrical similarities.



Fig. 4.32. The Francois Languille *apprentis* cottage at 631 Bourbon Street, Square 72, built in 1801. Date provided by Sally K. Reeves. JDE photo 2014.

One curiosity in Lafon's surveys is that despite the considerable in-filling of many of the lots following the 1804 survey (Fig. 4.23), the lot of Julie Brion remains unchanged though the ownership has been transferred to Pierre Foucher, a wealthy businessman. Her old house remains set far back on the lot. Fourteen years into the American period. Lots with houses set back in colonial fashion in this part of town must have seemed like anachronistic throw-backs. New architectural styles were being widely adopted by

francophone Creoles the second decade of the nineteenth century. The old, low-roofed French style houses had passed out of fashion.

Supplemental Background Information on Lafon's Methods and Techniques

Names

Lafon was a child of his time. He spelled names at times phonetically and always with enormous variations. The spelling of a name frequently varies within one paragraph or even within the same sentence. The idea that a name has to be spelled consistently the same way certainly didn't occur to him. This was typical for his time, but creates a nightmare for us today. Also it was not unusual to translate both first and last names when switching into another language. For instance, "Don Carlos Trudo" in Spanish is the same person as "Mr. Charles Trudeau" in French, but, surprisingly, Lafon refers to him more often than not as "Mr. Laveau," which is neither. Laveau was Trudeau's official middle name since birth, but had also become his nickname by which he was ubiquitously known throughout his lifetime. Lafon's survey book demonstrates that even in official documents his contemporaries preferred to call him by his nickname, probably in order to distinguish him from his three Trudeau brothers, who also lived in the city at the same time. To give another example, Lafon spells Edward Livingston, the prominent lawyer and politician of early 19th-Century America and one of his clients, in the French way, "Edouard Livingston," because he wrote in French.

Furthermore, Lafon uses at times abbreviations for public figures that we are no longer familiar with. For instance, Lafon seems to assume that everybody knows what "S. M. C." means. It refers to "Sa Majesté Catholique" and means in English "His Catholic Majesty" the King of Spain. The surveys in this book stem from the time immediately following the Louisiana Purchase, beginning in July 1804 and ending in March 1806, with some occasional property updates added in by Lafon in later years. They showcase Lafon's work during his first 2 years in office as the "surveyor approved for the Territory of Louisiana South of Tennessee." However, before the Americans arrived, Louisiana had been a Spanish

colony for about 40 years, ruled by “His Catholic Majesty” and yes, just about everybody in Louisiana at the time would have known how to refer to their former king.

In this translation, we have spelled the names of well-known public figures consistently the same, no matter how Lafon felt like spelling the respective names at the moment of writing, names such as Charles Laveau Trudeau (the last Spanish surveyor general, Lafon’s predecessor, and prominent city politician of New Orleans during the first two decades of American rule), Gilberto Guillemard (important French-born architect and builder in New Orleans of the Spanish colonial and early American era), Hilaire Boutté (another important builder and fellow Baratarian corsair of Jean Laffite), Jean Noël Destrehan (a leading politician and wealthy planter in late 18th and early 19th-century Louisiana), Edward Livingston, and others.

Surveyor’s Tools

La boussole: A compass (when used on land for land measurements).

Le graphomètre: A graphometer, a surveyor’s instrument; a sighting device with compass for measuring angles from a designated magnetic direction. Degrees were read off from the semicircular scale from an indicator on the rotating sight. A basic surveying instrument of the 17th and 18th centuries, it would be mounted on a tripod, leveled, and rotated to the desired line of sight before directions were taken and recorded.

Because the graphometer depended upon a magnetic compass to establish direction it was a less than satisfactory surveyor’s tool (Fig. 4.33). The accuracy of magnetic compasses are influenced by several factors including the methods and materials of manufacture and the possibility of magnetic distortions present in the soil. Surveyors in the late eighteenth century were forced to correct their magnetic observations through the use of astronomical sightings. They periodically had to sight on stars, and particularly Polaris, because chronometers, though developed in both England and France, were expensive and still registered inaccurate readings. Lafon occasionally discusses astronomical observations, but no evidence we encountered suggested that he regularly took astronomic observations to

correct his estimates of longitude and of his magnetic observations. American land surveyors discovered that making long distance survey lines, they had to cut down the trees and other vegetation to better view the other end of the survey line, and to take better readings from astronomical observations. This may be the reason that Lafon often states that he had to “elevate himself” before taking a sighting (Bedini 2006: 3).



Fig. 4.33. An 18th century French graphomètre, Clerget, Louis XV.

Measurements

Lafon used old French measurements, meaning measurements used by the *Ancien Régime* -- the French Monarchy before the French Revolution. They were not exactly the same as the equivalent American measurements. We have left the original French terms untranslated, as they appear in the surveys. If we were to translate Lafon’s terms, the following equivalent terms would have been used:

Lieue/lieux: A league “the arpent league.” In Louisiana, a unit of length measuring 84 linear arpents = 16,114.1 English feet, or 3.0519 English miles.

Arpent (linear) also “**arpent de face:**” A linear unit 180 *pieds du roi* in length = 191.835 English feet.

Arpent (superficiel): A square of land 180 *pieds du roi* on a side = 0.8448 English acres.

Toise: A fathom. 6 *pied du roi* = 6.395 English feet.

Pied (du roi; de Paris): A foot, 12 *pouces* = 1.06575 English feet.

Pouce: An inch. 1/12 of a *pied du roi* = 1.066 English inches.

Ligne: A “line.” In Louisiana, 1/8 of a *pouce* = 0.133 English inches.

Chaine d’arpenteur: In colonial Louisiana surveyors continued to use the French chain of 36 *pieds de Paris*, or 2 perches in length = 38.367 English feet. Later, in the Territorial period the surveyor’s chain was standardized at the American length of 66 English feet. Lafon continued to use French Measure (F.M.) through the Territorial Period, unless specified as E.M.

Trees

A considerable amount of labor was invested in the making of boundary markers. In the North, stones were often chiseled with information, but in Louisiana they were unavailable so Lafon had to depend on wooded boundary markers (*bornes*), which were manufactured on the spot. Lafon placed plaques or marks representing property lines on a variety of trees:

copalme = gumtree, sweet gumtree, or American gumtree

chêne = oak;

chêne vert = live oak.

saule = willow

cypre = cypress

mûrier = mulberry tree

cèdre = cedar

érable = maple

frêne = ash tree

liard = cottonwood tree

mantonet = mantel tree

Terms Uses for Borderline Markers

bois – any piece of wood including a stick.

borne = wooden borderline stake or boundary marker (mostly made of cypress).

berme = berm, the elevated bank of a canal, bayou or river.

piquet = wooden stub or stick. These were typically 2 – 4 inches in diameter

talon = wooden stub or stick

jalón = a mile stone

chicot = short wooden stick. This refers to a stump in French.

plaque = mark or sign placed on a borne or tree to mark the borderline, for example: XXXX.

pavillon = A boundary marker, literally a tent. Perhaps refers to a marker resembling the common

Norman gate post capped by a small pyramidal roof, though it is unknown whether such roofs were employed in Louisiana.

Frequently Used Expressions

concession. A grant of land from the government or the king, refers to a sizable piece of rural land. These were often in the form of Long Lots, and measured according to “*arpents de front*,” or “*arpents de face*,” that is, the width of the property along the curving bank of the bayou or river (Edwards and Kariouk, 2004: 68, 162-153).

batture. The shoreline and strip of land above it.

limitrophe. Adjacent (e.g. a contiguous neighbor).

borné par. Bounded by.

procès verbal. Warrant. The record of a land survey witnessed by a local authority and/or by interested parties such as contiguous neighbors.

en foi de quoi. In witness whereof.

esquarressant 7/8. Squared 7 by 8 inches. Lafon uses this expression to describe his hewn boundary markers, made with an axe on the site, often out of cypress. He is often very precise in describing the dimensions of these markers.

requérant. The “claimant” or “applicant” meaning the requesting party.

rive gauche/rive droit. The left-hand side of the river or bayou /the right-hand side of the river or bayou, looking downstream. For the Mississippi River, the *rive droit* is the west bank.

îlet. A city block or square.

air de vent. The direction.

greffe. A notary public – an official maker and keeper of public records such as contracts. Literally “registrar” or “scribe” but under Spanish colonial rule the role of an “*escrivano publico*” in Spanish, meaning “*greffe publique*” in French, and “public registrar” or “public scribe.”

du globe or *du monde*. On the global scale. Magnetic Declination, referring to measurements taken on his compass and corrected for the local declination from magnetic north. True north, for example, might vary by several degrees from magnetic north, depending on the exact location.

NOTES:

¹ In addition to the above mentioned plantation, Lafon owned properties at the corner of St. Louis and Burgundy streets, land in Plaquemines Parish, Opelousas, in Donaldsonville, and in Faubourg Annunciation.

² In 1810, Pease took the position of second Assistant Postmaster General of the United States until (possibly) 1818.

³ “Barthelémy Lafon, architect, engineer, cartographer, and militia officer from New Orleans. A tracing of the map was found in 1966 in the archives of the Service Historique de l’Armée at Vincennes. There are actually two maps: (1) “Carte du Mississipi et des ses Branches” and (2) “Carte d’une partie de la basse Louisiane et de la Florida Occidentale. The second is a portion of the first map, drawn to a larger scale” (Pitot 1968, Chap. 6, Note No. 1: 188).

⁴ Lemann, Bernard. 1966. *The Vieux Carré – A General Statement*. New Orleans: The School of Architecture, Tulane University.

⁵ <https://www.hnoc.org/vcs/>. Much of the specific information on the histories of individual Vieux Carré properties was obtained from this most valuable web site.

⁶ Dawdy, Shannon Lee, Jill-Karen Yakubik and Ryan Gray. 2008. *Archaeological Investigations at the Rising Sun Hotel Site (16OR225)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Department of Anthropology. Dawdy, Shannon Lee and Richard Weyhing. 2008. “Beneath the Rising Sun: ‘Frenchness’ and the Archaeology of Desire.” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 12. 370-387. McConnaughey, Janet. “In the French Quarter, Unearthing the Rising Sun.” *The Washington Post*, 10 Apr. 2005.

⁷ Heard, Malcolm 1997. *French Quarter Manual*. New Orleans: Tulane School of Architecture, p. 26; Vogt, Lloyd. 2002. *Historic Buildings of the French Quarter*. Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing. Pp. 39-129.

CHAPTER 5.
NEW ORLEANS URBAN LANDSCAPES AND ITS ARCHITECTURE
ON THE EVE OF AMERICANIZATION:
Barthelemy Lafon's Role in Shaping their Character.
Jay D. Edwards

Our view of New Orleans at the beginning of the Territorial Period (1803-1812) has been shrouded due to the lack of available contemporary records. This is particularly true of its architecture. No broad surveys of the architecture of the city were undertaken during the late Spanish colonial period. Drawings and sketches by architects of existing domestic architecture ca. 1803 are equally scarce. Carlos Leveau Trudeau conducted property surveys which have indications of buildings on them, but there are too few of these to provide any broad basis for generalizing about New Orleans vernacular architecture. So we are left with open questions such as: "Had the gable-sided form of the Creole cottage become popular at this time?" "Were properties in the Quarter now sufficiently narrow to encourage the introduction of shotgun-style linear cottages?" These questions are not unimportant. Good answers would point directly to the principal causes of architectural change and innovation at the beginning of the American period.

Luckily, thanks in large part to the recovery and translation of Barthelemy Lafon's Survey Book No. 3, 1804-1806, we have new information which helps to fill in some of these gaps in our knowledge. Barthelemy Lafon became the official surveyor for the Southern District of the Louisiana Territory early in 1804. In this position he conducted property surveys for land owners across southern Louisiana, but mostly in and around New Orleans.¹

Some of the features of Lafon's early surveys may be seen in his illustration and written description of a single square (block) in the French Quarter which he surveyed on the 6th of September, 1804 (Fig. 5.1). In some reports, Lafon surveys the lot lines of every property on the entire square. In others, he surveys the lot lines of the immediate neighbors, or all of the properties facing one side of the square in which his assigned property is located. He often shows the position and roof lines of each structure.

Lafon was called by to survey Mr. Joseph Foucher to survey a property he had recently acquired at the corner of Burgundy and St. Louis Streets. In his description of the *proces verbal*, or account of the survey, Lafon cites the previous legal record for the specific property being surveyed -- an act of sale in which Mr. Joseph Foucher acquired the full-sized 60 Ft. by 120 Ft. lot on August 31, 1785. Lafon names the previous owner, Julie Brion, and he specifies her race, a free mulatress, twice, as if it were an official title. He mentions the two current neighbors whose properties adjoin the lot of Julie Brion. He states that the modest house constructed on this lot is that of a previous owner, Mr. Bernard Chiloe.

Lafon measures the lengths of each side of the square, and adjusts the frontage of each lot based on the “surplus” or “loss” in actual length. That is, he subdivides the street fronts evenly into five whole lots and changes their measurements, based on the difference he finds between the assumed length of a square as 300 *pieds*, and the actual length which he has measured. The existing lots are then diminished or widened based on the greater or lesser difference in the actual measured length of the sides of the square. Measurements are in the old French system, which used “feet of Paris” (*pieds* - 1.067 English feet), “inches” (1/12 of a foot) and “lines” (which in Louisiana were one-eighth of a French inch -- *pouce*). Other information, such as previous official surveys of the properties in question are also taken into account.

Concerning Julie Brion’s lot, Lafon expands the present front of the lot to 60 Ft., 9 and ¾ inches. He reduces the depth of the lot to 115 Ft., 6 inches. Julie Brion, having died, the legal guardian of her minor children was Mr. Pierre Foucher. He informed Lafon that he would soon subdivide the lot into two parts (his reason for requesting this survey). The front of the lot with the original house was to become 84 Ft. deep. The remaining “surplus” in the back of the lot would then become 31 feet, 6 inches deep (on Burgundy Street).

On that back section, Lafon describes a newer “post-in-the-ground” house—a very inexpensive form of construction. Perhaps it was originally a detached kitchen? On the accompanying graphic plan (Fig. 5.1), Lafon lists Mr. Charles Lavaux, Free Mulatto, as the resident of that abode. Lavaux was closely related to the famous “voodoo queen,” Marie Laveau. The two lots in question are colored in rose. It may be worth mentioning that Lafon lists himself, “*arpenteur* (surveyor) Lafon,” as owner of the lot. In other words,

Lafon was going to purchase this lot from the estate of Julie Brion when it went up for public auction in 1808 (Pedesclaux 1810. COB 61/610). The old house at the corner of St. Louis and Burgundy Streets would become his pied-a-terre for many years. Here, he lived with his companion, Modeste, Fouchier. Thus, in this one survey we acquire a great deal of information, not only about the owners of the lot being surveyed and the reasons for the survey, but also about the neighbors, and even the processes of lot division and urbanization then under way.

On this particular square 91, at least, the houses are all indicated as hip roofed buildings (Fig. 5.1). In accordance with the Spanish post-fire building ordinances, most of them are built right against the front line of the properties. The Brion-Lafon house stood at what today would be numbered 934-936 Saint Louis Street. The two key lots in this square remain as originally laid out in the French colonial surveys. Mr. Bernard's corner lot has been expanded by 26 feet on Dauphine Street. The lot of François Boré, M.L. (*mulatre libre* - free Mulatto), is an original colonial central-square lot, as laid out by Adrien de Pauger in 1723. The other lots have been subdivided into 30 foot wide *demi-terrains* (half lots), or lots less deep than the original standard 120 French feet. When Joseph Pilié conducted his survey of property owners in the Quarter in 1808, he found that only six of the fifteen named property holders in Square 91 still held the same property they had owned four years earlier in 1804. Lafon is listed at the 936 St. Louis Street address, with the Brion Estate listed as still holding the rear 31.5 foot lot at 430 Burgundy Street. In these turbulent times, property was changing hands at a rapid rate in these back sections of the French Quarter--indeed, in all sections of the Quarter.

The Cultural Settings for Lafon's Architectural Contributions

The second great New Orleans fire of 1794 provided Barthelemy Lafon and other experienced New Orleans architects with outstanding opportunities. There was an entire city to be rebuilt. Lafon exploited this opportunity with great aplomb. Luckily for New Orleans, the Spanish Crown supported the rebuilding with donations and emergency funding. By 1800, the city was being rapidly modernized. Between 1795 and 1800, Lafon became one of the most successful and productive architect-builders in the city. Curiously, his commissions are not well documented, and he is not widely recognized for his numerous contributions to the built environments of turn-of-the-nineteenth-century New Orleans. Lafon seems to have worked mostly through hand-shake, or oral contracts. Few building contracts have been located. Only a few formal written building contracts survive in the New Orleans Notarial Archives but a number of his commissions from this period are still standing. Others are documented through inheritance records and other formal acts such as property sales. Some may be inferred because of his ownership or other close relationship with a piece of property at the time that a house was constructed there. We know that certain families favored his architecture, at least for a few years. Lafon developed a certain style, or set of styles, and these can be used to identify some of his "probable" commissions, otherwise undocumented. However, the full extent of his *oeuvre* will probably never be known. NOTE: refer to the supplement to this chapter, "Summary of Barthelemy Lafon's Architectural Contributions" pp. ____.

Eighteenth Century French Neoclassical.

In order to assess Lafon's architectural contributions, it would be useful to begin with a description of the kinds of buildings that existed in his world, and how they may have influenced him. Little is known about his architectural training in France, but it is clear that he had either formal or informal association with an architectural education. According to the French architectural scholar, Gilles-Antoine Langlois, Lafon arrived in New Orleans in 1789. One of his first jobs was to work on repairs to the Mississippi River levees.² In 1797 he drew plans for a magnificent public baths being planned for New Orleans. It was rendered in the fashionable French Neoclassical style. A full height two-story building, the structure was

elevated upon a plinth topped by a water table about four feet above grade. It was covered with a low-pitched hip roof. It was entered through a projecting portico fronted by doubled Doric pilasters capped by an architrave and plain frieze without pediment. Most of the façade of the building was pedimented with monumental pilasters. These were topped with a low balustrade decorated with classical urns. The building was large, with a four symmetrical bays on either side of the entrance portico. Short, two-bay unpedimented extensions completed either end. The windows of the central portion were capped with segmental arches on the ground floor, and rectangular tops on the taller “first floor” (second floor), typical of neoclassical structures world-wide. Double front entrance stairs in the curved French fashion suggest that one side was to accommodate women, the other for men (Fig. 5.2).



Fig. 5.2. A rendering of Lafon's proposed Public Bath for New Orleans, 1797. This study image is the property of the Louisiana History Section (Old Mint) of the Louisiana State Museum. It may not be reproduced without permission of the owners.

Some observers have linked the design of this building with the French neoclassical architecture of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux -- particularly that of the famous Château of Bénéville in Normandy (1770-1780). This four-story building is considered Ledoux's masterpiece. He is recognized as one of the foremost French architects of the period and Lafon, fascinated with architecture, could hardly have escaped his notice. The Chateau itself contains a projecting rectangular three-story tall classical entrance supported by four monumental Ionic columns and flanking pilasters but (no pediment (Fig. 5.3). There is a sizable ground

floor (*rez-de-chaussée*), a taller “first floor” (*piano noble*), and a low “second floor” (English third floor) lit by small windows aligned with those below. Surmounting the “second floor” is a full entablature surrounding the entire building, topped by a strongly projecting cornice. Above that is a medium height “third floor” (English fourth floor) with its own, diminished cornice topped with a rectangular balustrade. The windows are set in regularly spaced bays across the wide façade, but each of the windows is a different height and they are grouped into three lower and one upper course, separated by the principal cornice. The effect is that of a flat-roofed three story neoclassical house with a matching pent house set on top of it but set back slightly from that below (Fig. 5.3).

Lafon’s public baths project was apparently too grandiose for provincial New Orleans, for it was never built, but the style of the Chateau of Bénouville had impressed him even earlier. He appropriated even more of its artistic features into his design for the Pedesclaux-Le Monnier “skyscraper” at 636-642 Royal Street, which he designed in 1795 (compare Figs. 5.3 with 5.4). Although the architects Arsène Latour and Jean Laclotte are credited with completing the design of the Royal Street building, it is clear that its finished state reflects Lafon’s original design based on the Château de Bénouville.



Fig. 5.3. Chateau de Bénouville, Normandy, built 1769-1780, and designed by Charles-Nicolas Ledoux. Barthélemy Lafon was inspired by this new French neoclassical style of architecture and applied its elements to several of his commissions, particularly the Pedesclaux-Le Monnier house, 636-642 Royal Street in 1795.



Fig. 5.4. The Pedesclaux-Le Monnier House, 636-642 Royal Street. This building was designed by Lafon in 1795. In 1805 he advertised that his offices were located here. The window treatments and projecting cornice-like belt courses are strongly reminiscent of the Chateau de Bénouville, though Lafon has added flat band window surrounds. Note that the original semi-circular window openings in the *rez-de-chaussée* have been changed for commercial purposes. JDE Photo, 2014.

Eighteenth Century Spanish Colonial Neoclassical.

No sooner had Lafon begun to design and construct buildings in New Orleans than he fell under the influence of the best of local high-style architecture. Perhaps the most imitated was an architect who had worked for the Spanish military for many years before arriving in Spanish New Orleans in 1770. Gilberto Guillemard is thought to have designed an unusual center *porte-cochère* house for Dr. Joseph Montegut (Fig. 5.5). Guillemard's signed plans a six-room single-story "wing" survive. It was designed in the same

style but built in 1790. Montegut was one of the wealthier citizens of the city at this time. He was the Surgeon General of the Royal Hospital of New Orleans. His house, 729-733 Royal Street, was designed in the latest Spanish Creole style. It was probably designed and built in the late 1780s following the first fire (1788) and probably also by Guillemard. This portion of Royal Street was consumed in the first fire, but not by the second, which burned only as far as Orleans Avenue. The style of this house is very similar to that of two other late eighteenth or early nineteenth houses still standing in New Orleans.³

Guillemard was experienced in Spanish colonial architecture. He is known to have worked in Spanish Pensacola, post-revolutionary Mobile, and at La Balise post near the mouth of the Mississippi River, before arriving in New Orleans (Langlois 2018:387). Though Guillemard was born in France, he held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Spanish army. In 1792 he designed and constructed the five forts which stood at the corners of the enceinte or heavy palisade which the Spanish Governor, Carondelet, had ordered built to protect New Orleans from a rumored invasion by the Americans under Aaron Burr, and perhaps from potential attacks of slave uprisings such as that occurring in Santo-Domingo (Wilson 1968:45-48). Guillemard brought Spanish colonial neoclassical forms to the very center of New Orleans when he was commissioned to design and rebuild the Cabildo (1799) and the Presbytere (1813), as well as the St. Louis church on Jackson Square.



Fig. 5.5. The Joseph Montegut house, 729-733 Royal Street, built ca. 1788. This house is dressed in Spanish neoclassical style. It was probably designed by Gilberto Guillemard. The house originally had a flat, Spanish style terrace roof, later covered over by a steeply pitched gable roof. The sketch is by Albert Woad, 1871: HNOC (1965.15). Guillemard's 1790 expansion of the house is to the right (refer also to Fig. 5.6).

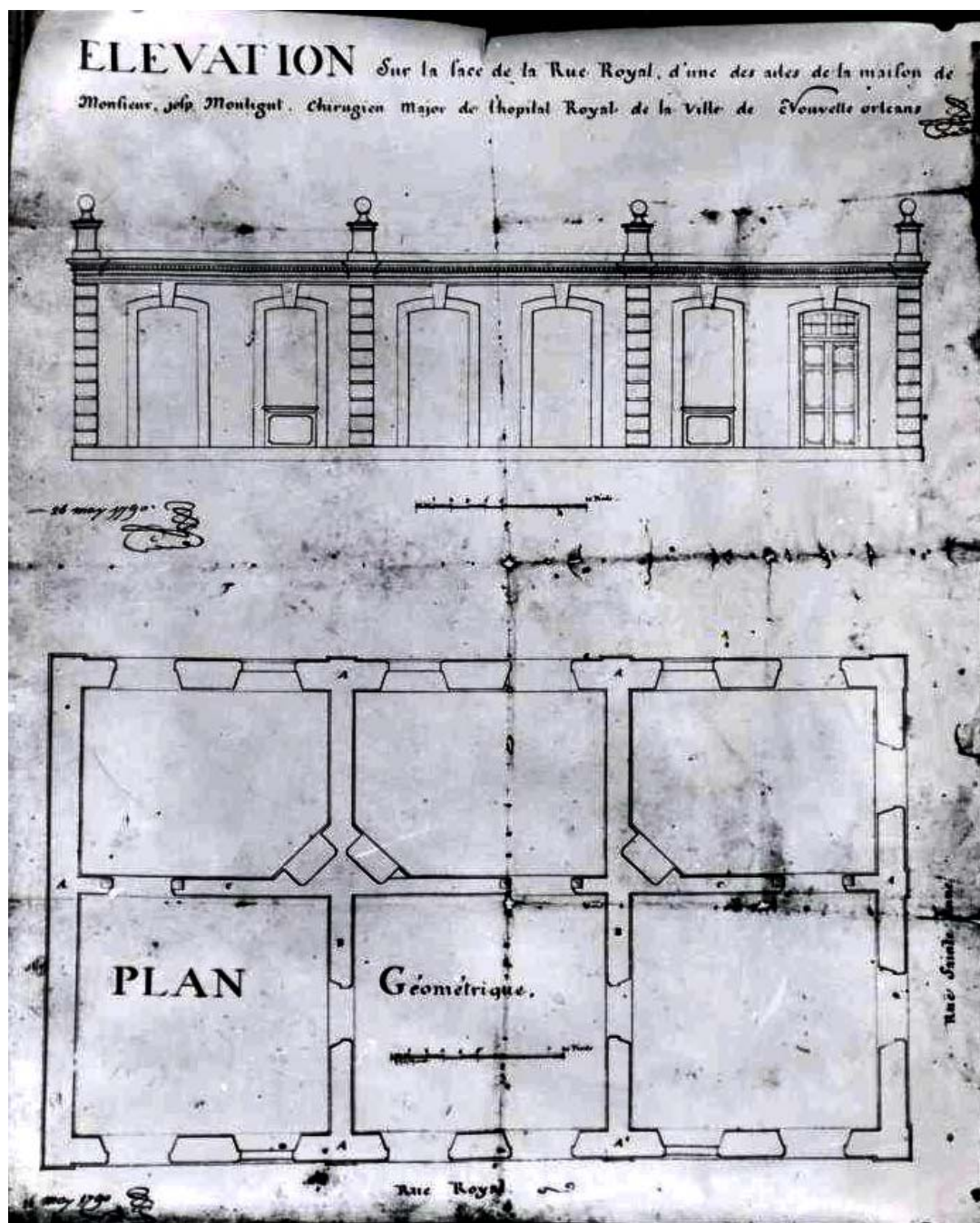


Fig. 5.6. 735-741 Royal Street. A plan for an expansion of the The Joseph Montegut house at the corner of Royal and St. Anne Streets. This semi-double plan was signed by Gilberto Guillemard, experienced in Spanish colonial neoclassical styles. A portion of the façade of this expansion is seen on the right side of the image in Fig. 5.5. HNOC.

Guillimard also designed the Orue-Pontalba house (1796), which stood at the corner of the Place d'Armes at the intersection of St. Peter and Chartres Streets (633-643 Chartres Street). These buildings were late

eighteenth century Spanish colonial neoclassical and might have as easily been found in Santo Domingo City or in Havana at the same time (Fig. 5.7).

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Spanish colonial neoclassical was characterized by certain distinctive features. These included low-pitched *azotera* (terrace) roofs, and strong horizontal banding with projecting entablatures or “cornices” running across the facades of the buildings. Even on the grandest buildings, architects employed simplified classical elements such as porticos, columns, and more often, pilasters with Ionic, Doric or Tuscan capitals. Decoration was restrained. The effect sometimes approaching a kind of post-modern classical. Pilasters were sometimes rendered as stacked rusticated quoins, particularly on the corners of the facades (Figs. 5.7, 5.8, 5.14, 5.15). Spacing between bays was regular, with tall rectangular windows and doors. Some facades employed tripartite-symmetry with a central element bounded by mirror-image units on either side. On larger facades, engaged pediments were sometimes placed above central entranceways, such as on the Orue-Pontalba house (Fig. 5.8 – left side). Cantilevered balconies on the upper floors were decorated with wrought iron balustrades, sometimes highly elaborate, as in the work of the Spanish master craftsman, Marcelino Hernandez (similar decorative balconies and rusticated quoins were also to be found in French neoclassical architecture of this period). Heavy masonry balustrades surrounded the edges of the roofs, often with decorative urns (*copas*) or pedestal-like elements mounted at regular intervals across the balustrade. These were capped with balls or floral displays. On the ground or service levels, and/or on the living floors above, openings were capped with *demi-lune* (semi-circular) transom lights, or with segmental arches. Arcades were widely popular on grander buildings, particularly in Cuba. In New Orleans their principal expression is found on Guillemard’s Cabildo and Presbytere facing Jackson Square.

A highly distinctive feature of Spanish colonial neoclassical architecture was the use of flat-band “architrave” surrounds on the doors and windows of the ground and/or the upper floors. It was this element which Lafon borrowed into his own designs from the Spanish colonial styles, creating a kind of creolized French/Spanish neoclassical all his own (Figs. 5.11, 5.14). It is possible to identify several of his undocumented commissions from his unique combination of stylistic elements.

Another popular Spanish neoclassical feature was the *platibanda*. This is another form of flat band which surrounds the entire ground floor façade of the building, and sometimes the upper floors as well. It is common in the vernacularized Creole neoclassical architecture of Cuba, and particularly in the city of Santiago, and more widely in the Oriente (eastern Cuba), where numerous refugees from the Haitian Revolution settled before coming to New Orleans in 1804 and 1809. The earliest expression of a platibanda like feature which I know of is to be found on the Antoine Cavelier storehouse at 627-31 Royal Street, built ca. 1789. Cavelier was an associate of Joseph Montegut, and, building their two houses at about the same time and near to one-another, they may have used the same architect, though his name was not recorded. Like the Montegut house, this one has a central carriageway running through to the rear patio. It also employs stacked rusticated pilasters on the edges of the façade connected by a flat architrave band across the top of the elevated “first floor.” The building is also extant. It may have helped to set the style for the New Orleans Creole *platabanda*, which, in the coming three decades would become enormously popular. This is sometimes referred to as “raised stucco banding” by local New Orleans architectural historians.



Fig. 5.7. The Antoine Cavelier storehouse at 627-31 Royal Street, built following the first fire ca. 1789. This house may well have been designed by Gilberto Guillemard, and it may have introduced the Spanish colonial *platibanda*, or façade architrave style into New Orleans. The painting is by William Woodward, ca. 1904, courtesy the New Orleans Museum of Art.



Fig. 5.8. The Orue-Pontabla house at the corner of St. Peter and Chartres Streets. The house was designed by Gilberto Guillemard in 1796. It is entirely within the mode of Spanish colonial neoclassical. This image is a painting by Boyd Cruise, copied from a ca. 1900 photograph of the original building, which has now been rebuilt several times.

The Montegut house expansion provides an example of the kinds of floorplan and façade geometry being employed in professional architecture of the Lafon period. Luckily, a highly detailed plan of this wing of the Montegut house rendered by Gilberto Guillemard in 1790 survives (Fig. 5.6). The floorplan is a *semi-double*. The three principal *appartements* (main front rooms) each measure 14.5 feet wide by 13.5 feet deep (F.M.). Near-square rooms of this size may be taken as typical of the more elegant houses of the day. Each of the front rooms is matched by a *semi-double* immediately behind it. These measure 11.0 feet deep by the same width. The exterior walls are 1.5 feet thick, built in brick. Some of the interior walls are 1.0 feet in thickness. Curiously, only the semi-double rooms are served by fireplaces. This is, perhaps, an indication that the front rooms of this portion of the house were intended for commercial purposes. Another clue to commercialization of this portion of the house is the fact that some of the windows facing the street of both the wing and the main house are protected with projecting bay windows reminiscent of the popular

guardapolvo (dust-protector) window covers so popular in Cuba at this time. In New Orleans in later decades, these would be known as *vitrines* (Heard 1997:64). In New Orleans they functioned as display windows for merchandise (refer to A. R. Waud illustration, 1871, Fig. 5.5, and Fig. 5.24).

We can compare the geometry of Guillemard's elegant commission for Dr. Montegut in 1790 with Barthelemy Lafon's plans for a similarly elite lady of New Orleans, Mlle. Jeanne Macarty. Lafon was commissioned to rebuild the Macarty house in 1794. He designed a storehouse with a semi-double floorplan, fronted with a balcony over the street, and backed by a cabinet-loggia range of rooms. Curiously, Lafon used a scale unit of two *pieds* (feet) in length on his plans. The *appartement* rooms of the new Macarty house were 15.4 *pieds* deep by 13.6 *pieds* wide. The semi-double rooms behind them were 13.6 French feet deep. The ratio of the depth of semi-double rooms to the front rooms in the Montegut expansion was 0.82, while that in the Macarty house was 0.88 (rear rooms were deeper - Fig. 5.9b).

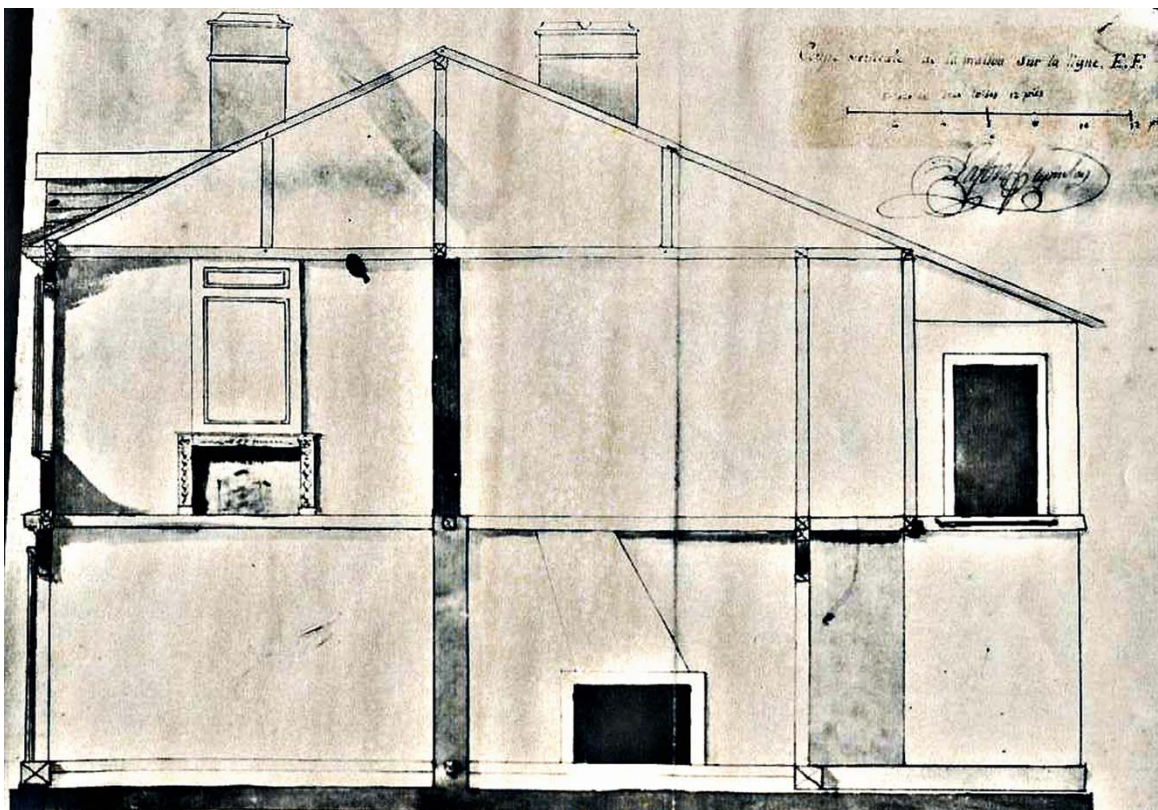


Fig. 5.9a. Section View: Lafon's plan for the Mlle. Macarty house, to be built at 401 Decatur Street, corner Conti, in 1795. This was a timber frame house raised on brick posts, with front balcony and rear cabinet and loggia rooms. Plan from the Louisiana State Museum, Spanish Colonial Records No. 3361.

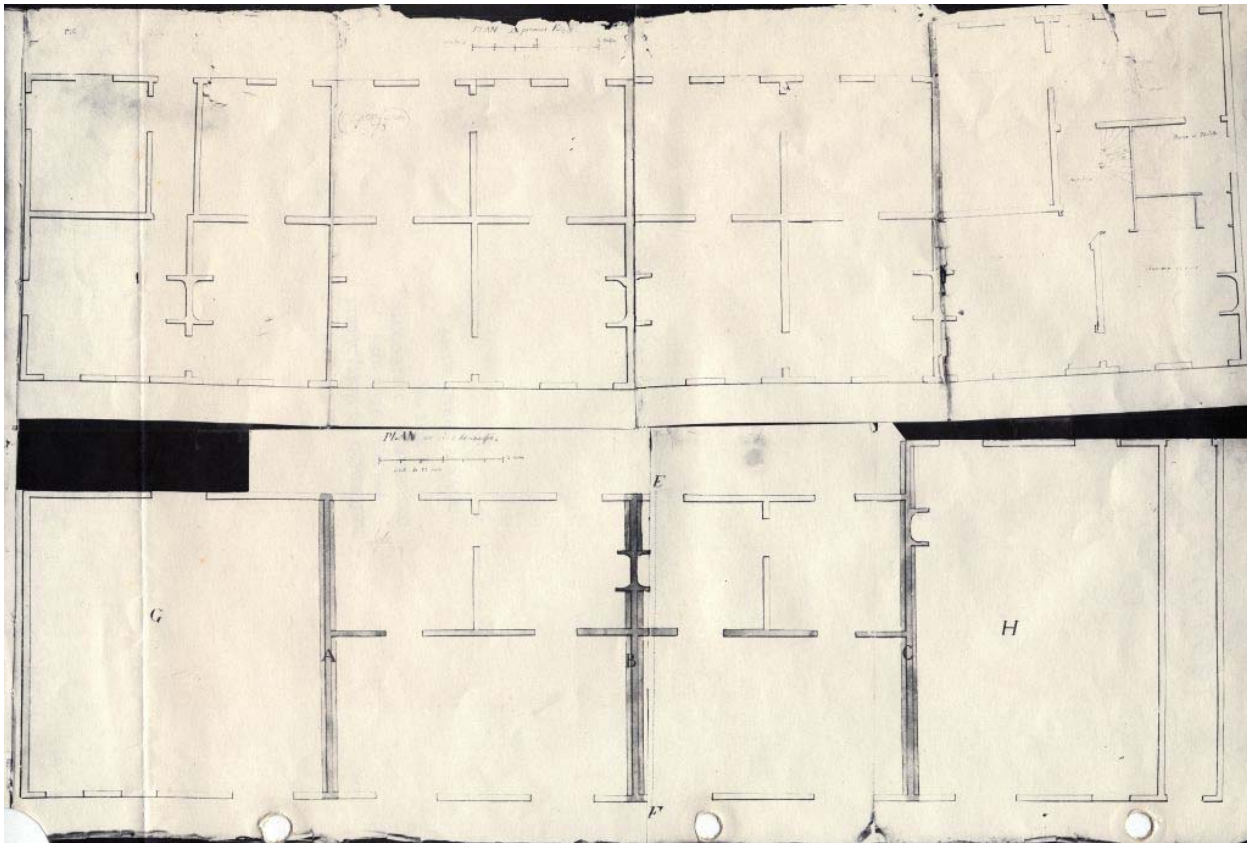


Fig. 5.9b. Florplans by Barthelémy Lafon for a house for Mlle. Macarty, to be built at 401 Decatur Street (corner Conti), in 1794. The lower set of rooms are for the ground floor shops, while the upper set are the living rooms of the house set on the second level. The plan is subtly semi-double. Courtesy the Louisiana State Museum, Spanish Colonial Records No. 3361.

Much is often made of the fact that the patio was the central part of the Spanish colonial house, and that following the great fires, many townhouses and storehouses in New Orleans were designed with rear patios. There are, however, problems with the idea that the Andalusian-derived Cuban or Dominican patio was copied directly into New Orleans architecture. One of these is that these houses were almost all designed by French architects. Another is that in the mid-eighteenth century, many French town houses were *porte-cochère* (carriageway) houses which opened into rear patios. The abundant eighteenth century town houses and small hotels of Paris were examples of this style of house. The floorplan geometry of most of the New Orleans *porte-cochère* store-houses is far closer to those of France than it is to the colonial houses of the Spanish in the Caribbean.⁴ In other words, despite the Spanish colonial influence of Gilberto

Guillemard, the typical New Orleans patio house is more of a French urban townhouse than it is an Andalusian patio house.

Barthelemy Lafon amalgamated the basic geometry and prominent cornice treatments of late eighteenth century French neoclassical facades with the quoining, flat-band window and door surrounds (architraves), segmental arch-headed fenestrations, cantilevered balconies, elaborate wrought iron ballustrades, and barrel tile roofs of Spanish colonial neoclassical architecture. He also adopted the popular Cuban *entre suelo*, or *entresol* --diminutive second floor level -- into several of his notable town houses. Lafon occasionally added pilasters with simplified Tuscan or Ionic capitals to his facades. The result was his own personal genre of high style architecture. The Tremoulet-Pavie Storehouse at the corner of Royal and Saint Louis Streets is an excellent example of Lafon's work. All the ground floor openings are headed with semi-lunate transom lights which open into the *entresol*. The upper "first" floor is surrounded on the street sides with a cantilevered wooden balcony. The house was built ca. 1795, and was recorded for an auction sale in 1842 by Benjamin Buisson, surveyor. The wooden balcony is supported by S shaped wrought iron brackets. The building still stands in changed form. Lafon is known to have engaged in business dealings with Bernard Tremoulet in 1792 (Fig. 5.10).

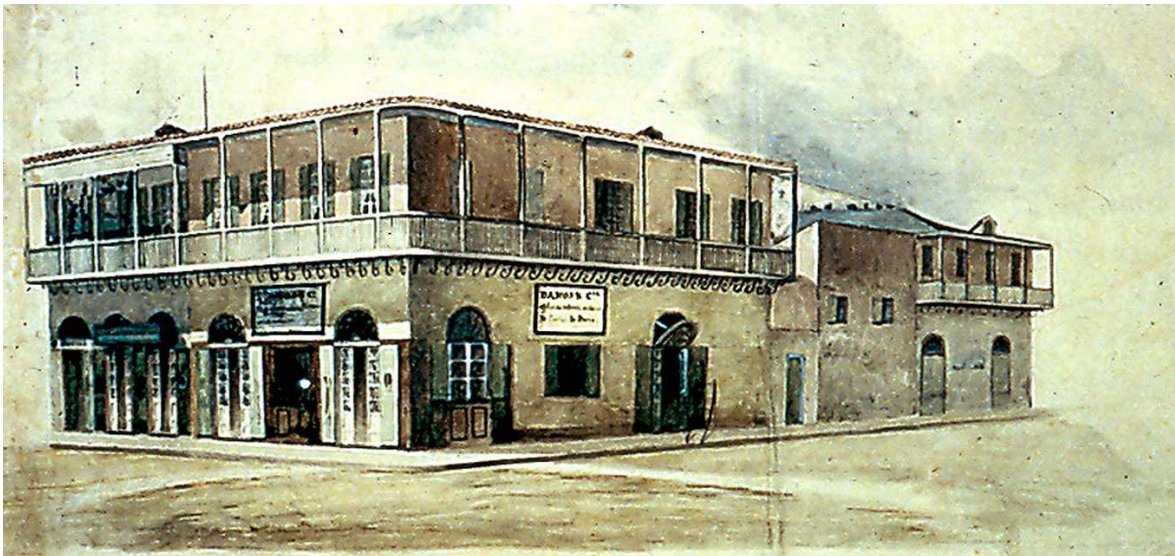


Fig. 5.10. The Bernard Tremoulet/José Pavie entresol Storehouse at 437-441 Royal Street, corner St. Louis Street, ca. 1795. NONA 055.029.



Fig. 5.11. The Joseph Vincent Rillieux Storehouse at 335-341 Royal Street, 1795-1800. Vieux Carré Survey photo, JDE, 2014.

The Rillieux house in creolized Spanish/French neoclassical style was built between 1795 and 1800 (Fig. 5.11). It is exactly one block away from the Tremoulet House on Royal Street. It represents, perhaps, Lafon's finest neoclassical work. The façade is somewhat similar to another Lafon commission, the Bosque house in the 600 block of Chartres Street (Fig. 5.12). It also bears considerable resemblance the storehouse at 513-515 Decatur Street, also designed by Lafon (Fig. 5.15). Although, like the Tremoulet house, the Rillieux house makes use of *demi-lune* ground floor openings, it is not an entresol house. This house has some of the finest examples of "Spanish" wrought iron balustrades which survive in New Orleans. The original balustrade was, according to Sam Wilson Jr., the work of Marcelino Hernandez, a Spanish iron monger of great artistic skill.⁵ Marcelino's company was also responsible for creating the balustrades on the Cabildo on Jackson Square, which also survive.

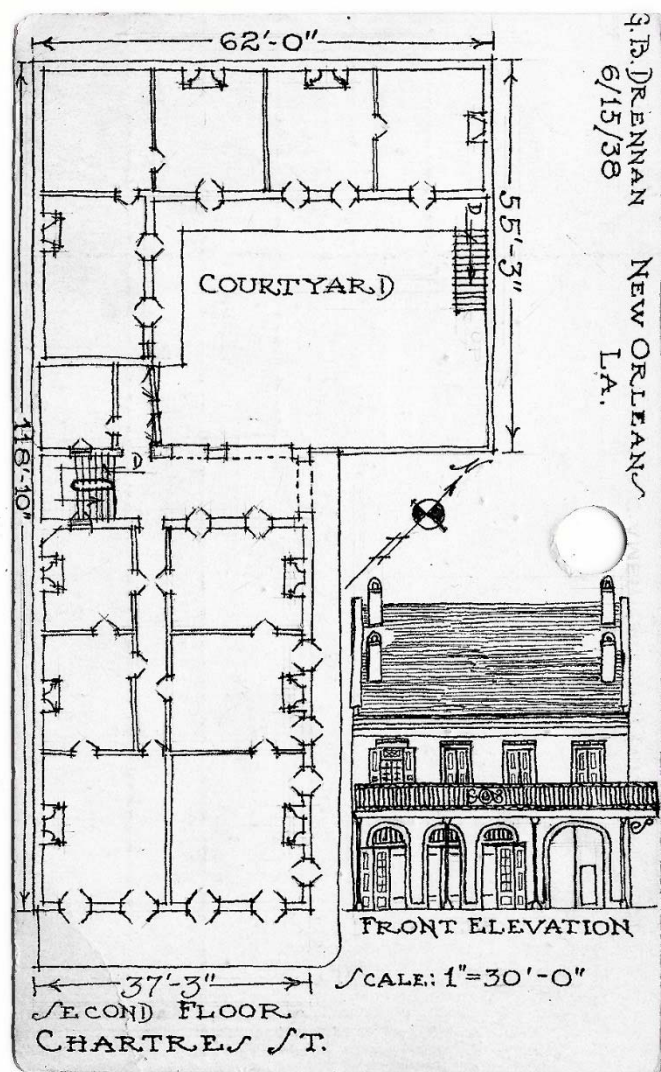


Fig. 5.12. The ca. 1795 Bosque House, at 617-619 Chartres Street, attributed to Barthelemy Lafon. This card verso from the 1938 Historic American Buildings Survey of Louisiana, drawing by G.B. Drennan, courtesy the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress.

The Bartholome Bosque house is located in the middle of the 600 block of Chartres Street. It stands in Square 42 – the “bad luck square” surrounded by Chartres, Royal, Toulouse and St. Peter Streets. Despite the fact that this house is one of the oldest standing houses in New Orleans, it is, in fact, the fourth house to be located on the same lot. The first house was constructed in 1722 by cabinet maker Pierre Thomelin, and like many French Colonial houses of that day, it was set back about sixteen feet from the front line of the lot according to the 1731 map of Square 42 by Gonichon. The second house, also set back, was built in 1734 in

the Creole style. It was a timber frame house bricked between posts and raised eight feet high on a *rez-de-chaussée*, or brick-walled “basement.” Like Madam John’s Legacy, it had both front and rear galleries, and measured 52 feet wide by 36 feet deep. The “basement” held shops and *bodegas* (store rooms). Governor Galvez, the governor of the Spanish Louisiana Colony, lived there between 1781 and 1784. By 1788 the Royal Treasurer of the province Don Vincent José Nuñez lived there, and it was in his house that the disastrous fire of that year was started. According to Governor Miro’s account, 856 structures were destroyed together with most of its old French colonial architecture of the city (Fig. 2.29).⁶

In 1789 Nuñez began the construction of a new house, but he sold it unfinished to Joseph Xavier de Pontalba, who was probably the wealthiest man in the city at that time. Pontalba completed the house, but in 1794 another fire began in the house of Mr. François Mayronnes on Royal Street in the same square 42. That fire re-burned Square 42 and jumped across St. Peter Street to burn the new Cabildo and threaten the new St. Louis church then under construction. But then, a blessed miracle. The wind shifted and the fire turned uptown towards the future Canal Street, destroying 212 structures including those surviving French colonial residences between Royal and Chartres Streets which had not been previously consumed in 1788 (Gayarré, 1903: Vol. III, p. 336).

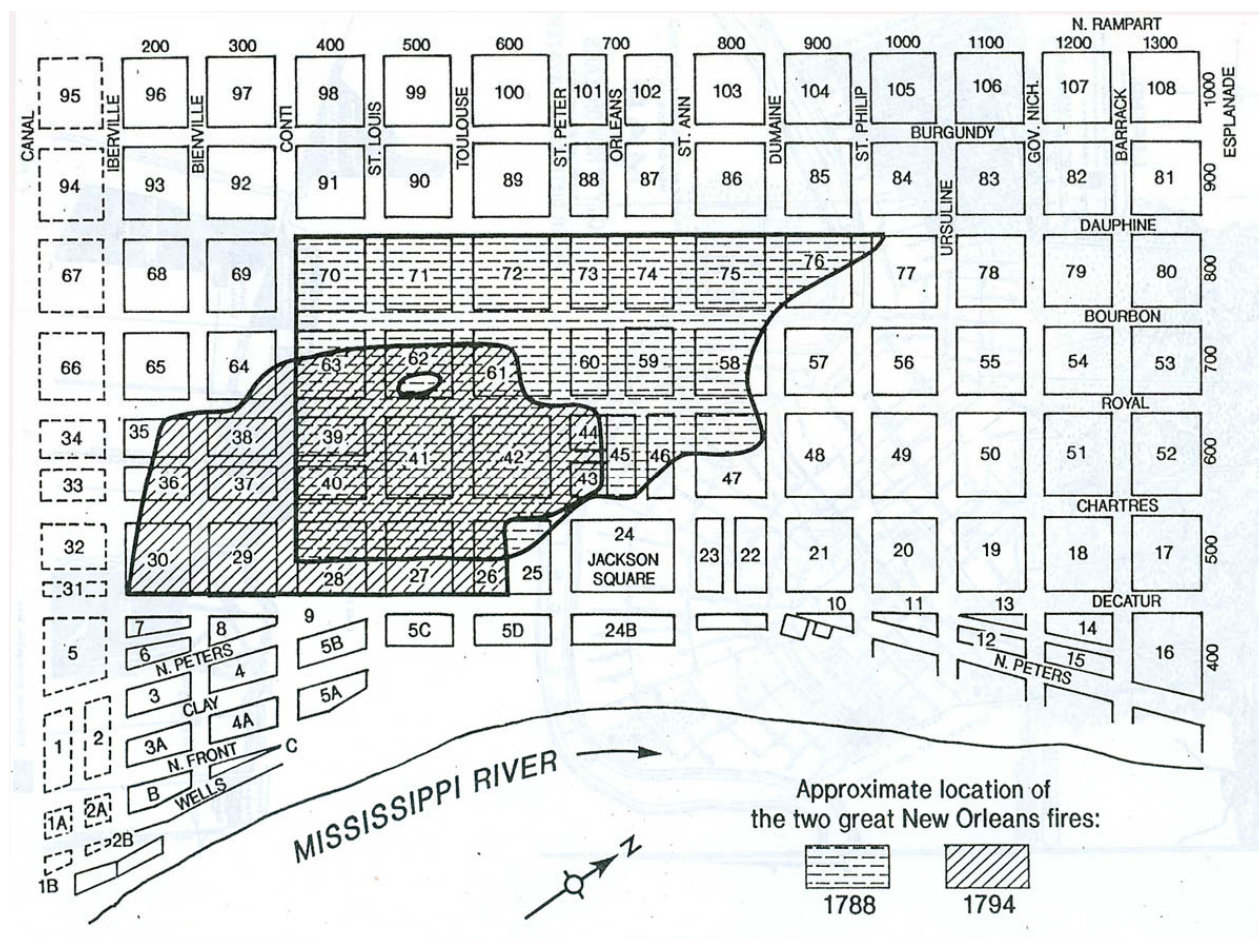


Fig.⁷ 5.13. The Squares of the French Quarter of New Orleans with street names, square numbers, and the extent of the two great fires indicated. Map by Jay Edwards and Mary Lee Eggart.

Pontalba sold the ruined property to Bartholome Bosque, a wealthy merchant and native of Majorica. Architectural historian Edith Long wrote that Bosque's new house was built by Barthelemy Lafon in 1795, using the bricks of the burned buildings.⁷ The new house was described as "a beautiful house... situated on Chartres Street, built of brick, roofed *"en terasse,"* having a courtyard and a back yard. The front portion is divided in two by a corridor (*porte-cochère*).⁷ One notable surviving feature of the house is the original wrought-iron balustrade, probably also specially fabricated by Marcellino Hernandez, with its own central crest of interlocked letter Bs (for Barthelome Bosque).

The Bosque house was owned by a number of other notables including Bernard Marigny, who purchased it in 1825. It was his plantation just downstream from the lower colonial ramparts which was

subdivided beginning c. 1805 to become Faubourg Marigny, a process in which Barthelemy Lafon was involved. The Barthelome Bosque house was the subject of a set of measured HABS drawings in 1937. It still stands, although it was severely renovated in the twentieth century.

The Lafon style remained popular for a while in late Spanish and early American New Orleans. Some twenty-five buildings are reasonably attributed to him, and there were probably others which remain unrecognized (refer to the summary “Barthelemy Lafon’s Architectural Contributions”). Below are additional examples of Lafon’s style which either survive, or which survived long enough to be documented by the legal recording artists of the nineteenth century for the purposes of auction sales.

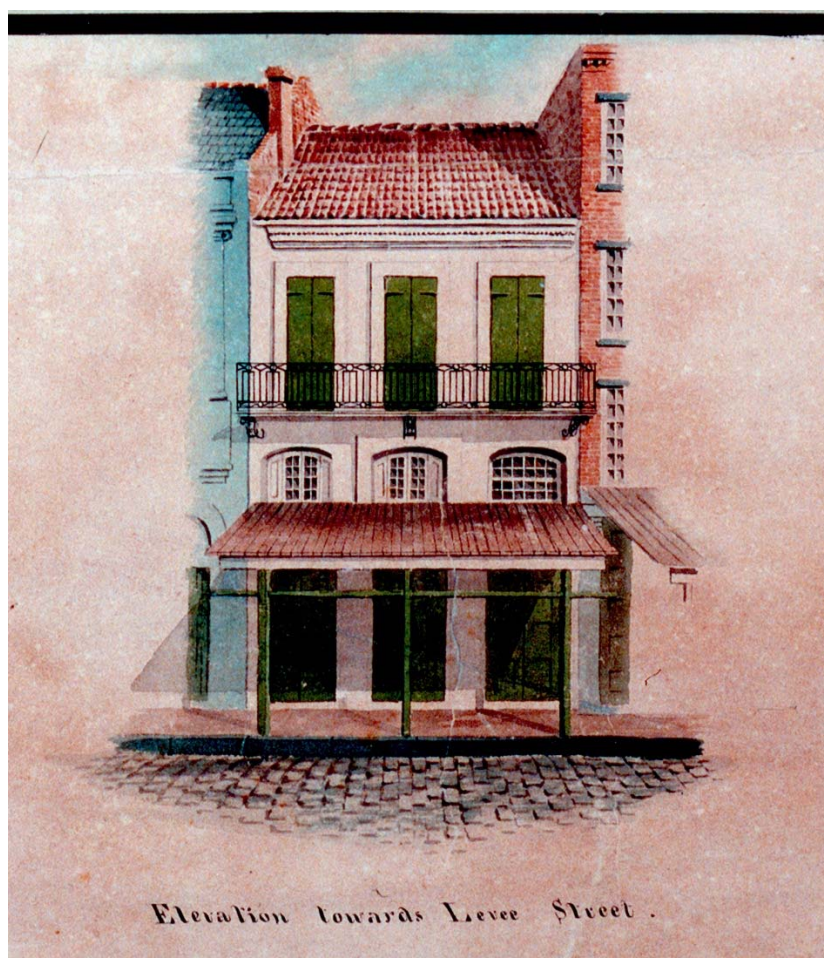


Fig. 5.14. The Miguel Fortier House, An entresol store house at 517 Decatur, built ca. 1795 by Barthelemy Lafon. Painting by Charles A. de Armas, Architect (1852). NONA plan book 044.023.

The Miguel Fortier Storehouse at 517 Decatur Street survives (Fig. 5.14). It was “Most likely designed by Lafon” (Diboll Vieux Carré survey). Built by Joseph Duguet, Master Mason, according to the building contract of Nov. 7, 1795, filed with Pierre Pedesclaux. Miguel Fortier sold the building to Bartholomew Campanel, h.c.l., in 1811. Campanel died a rich man in Paris in 1853. His son, Barthelemy Campanel (h.c.l.) owned the properties at the corner of Toulouse and Dauphine Streets (Fig. 5.37). He was a well-to-do hardware shop owner who owned several properties in the Quarter. A portion of the building at 513-515 Decatur, also by Lafon, may be seen on the left edge of this image. Note the pilaster with Ionic capital. It might be termed a creolized Spanish neoclassical façade.





Fig. 5.15. The Etienne Debon storehouse at 507-511 Decatur Street. It was designed and constructed by Lafon in 1798. Illustration by Charles de Armas (1862). NONA 006.111. The building on the right side at 313-315 Decatur was also designed by Lafon.

The Etienne Debon storehouse is another example of a three-bay storehouse set in the same block as the two buildings mentioned above (Fig. 5.15). Lafon purchased contiguous properties in Square 27 on what is now Decatur Street for the purposes of commercial development in the 1790s. Here, Lafon's design includes stacked rusticated quoins in the form of pilasters at the edges of the façade. They are much like those heavier quoins designed by Guillmard for the expansion of the Montegut house (Fig. 5.6). Unlike

most commercial storehouses, Lafon's roof projects out over the banquette in Caribbean Creole style, covering the balcony on the second floor without supporting posts. The same building which was seen on the left side of Fig. 5.14, may also be seen on the right side of Fig. 5.15. In the ten years since the earlier image, Lafon's middle building at 513-515 Decatur seems to have been modernized in the Greek Revival style, its old pilasters removed and a low attic room lighted by frieze windows, added. All of these Lafon buildings retain flat band surrounds for the windows and doors (Fig. 5.4).

New Orleans Vernacular Architecture, and Lafon's Relations with It.

High-style in the latest fashion was not the only type of architecture which characterized New Orleans in the 1795-1805 decade. Indeed, it was not even the most common style. Most residents of the city were not sufficiently wealthy to be able to afford architect-designed houses. The vast majority resorted to vernacular forms, mostly built in cypress. Today, we refer to the styles of this built landscape as Creole vernacular. For many visitors, however, the Creole vernacular was an invisible style.

Most travelers to the city extolled the elegance of the grand houses and businesses which crowded Decatur, Chartres and Royal Streets. Take, for example, the description of Doctor John Sibley, who visited New Orleans in 1802. Here are some quotes from his journal:⁸

The town is large, regularly lay'd off and well built, many of the houses elegant, cost in building 40 or 50,000 dollars, mostly brick or stone covered with tile and plastered, outside & in the fronts generally painted white & look well & full of people. [There were no stone houses in New Orleans, but some had pseudo-ashlar scoring on the plastered fronts.]

The streets are lay'd parallel with the river, are about 40 feet wide, intersected by streets at right angles, paved with tile along one foot way, the middle unpav'd, a gutter between the foot way made by three pieces of timber, the top being even with the pavement is usually walked on. [Sibley seems to be describing what was called a *contra-banquette* in New Orleans – a lining of wooden timbers for a drainage ditch between the street and the wooden plank sidewalks (*banquettes*).

The houses are all small & very dear, a house that in North Carolina might be bought for \$100 would sell here for \$250.

The ground floor of all the houses are occupied by stores & shops, the families live on the second floor, the back yards and alleys are all til'd with hard square tile 6 inches square.

The street or road that leads from the town to the buyo is all the way built on within 50 or 100 yards, several handsome places with orange groves and gardens, the ground a very strong clay soil sworded over with beautiful fine grass and clover... At the bayo are about 50 houses and some appearance of business. Some brick and tile yards, blacksmiths, etc. [Here Sibley refers to Bayou St. John and the Bayou Road].

The greatest number of the houses, particularly those newly built, are flat roofed. They first lay on strong beams, a little sloping think plank, then plaister of lime, earth & tar, then brick tile lay'd in lime, over all & rough coat of tar, lime & oyster shells that in length of time become like solid rock & never leak a drop, a balustrade round ornamented with urns, balls, etc., and the tops of houses are as their back yards, the women wash, iron, sit to work & the men walk on them & go from the top of one house to the top of another & visit their neighbours without having any thing to do with the streets below. Many have shrubs and flowers on their houses--no wood shingles are used, either cement, slate, or tile. ... a great proportion of the buildings are very expensive, durable & handsome.

The problem is that Dr. Sibley seems not to have visited those portions of the city away from the built-up commercial and governmental zone next to the river. Most short-time visitors saw only the more elegant parts of town. The larger sections stretching out to Rampart Street and down river towards Barracks (Quartier) and Hospital (Gov. Nicholls) Streets were populated with single-story or undecorated two-story

buildings which could not be seen as elegant. Indeed, residences ranged from the crude self-built folk houses which had been thrown up following the great fire of 1788, to presentable houses built of wood, but whose facades were plastered over with stucco in accordance with the 1795 building ordinances of the Cabildo.

Even some of the best architectural minds in the country concurred with this more sentimental image of New Orleans, neglecting its rougher-hewn neighborhoods. When Benjamin Latrobe arrived in 1808, he wrote that it was the most beautiful city in the United States. To Latrobe, the Parisian architects Arsène Lacarrière Latour and Hyacinthe Laclotte had set the style of New Orleans French architecture. It was unlikely to be submerged under Anglo-American taste for a long time to come.⁹ Latrobe extolls the French style of the La Monnier house, but he fails to mention its original designer/builder, Barthelemy Lafon.

But occasionally we also come across a few more balanced and less laudatory descriptions of New Orleans in this period. Also in 1802 the French visitor Berquin-Duvallon wrote the following descriptions of the houses of New Orleans.¹⁰

(Visitors tend to see) the beautiful houses which are on the Mississippi and the believe that the citizens enjoy great wealth, but with the exception of a few solidly built modern houses one sees, there are many others whose construction and roofs show a depth of poverty which is surprising (pp. 65-66).

There are some solid and less risky buildings that have been built along the riverbanks, and in the first streets in the front of the town. These are constructed of fired brick, a few being two stories high with narrow front galleries on the front of the ground floors. In the other parts of the city and the neighborhood, one sees nothing but hovels and huts (*baraques* – perhaps referring to *poteaux-en-terre* – earthfast construction; pp. 167-68).

One half of the city has not been built up following the two fires. There are streets where scarce twenty houses can be counted (p. 71).

The number of houses may be computed at about fourteen hundred, and the area of the city, about three hundred acres; the whole of which however, is not built over, as many of the squares at the north-west end [sic., northern corner] are totally void of houses. The principal buildings are as near the river as the plan of the city will admit, and houses situated near this spot are of more value than those situated further back from the Mississippi.¹¹

The last governor [Claiborne] forbid houses to have wooden roofs, but this is not obeyed. (p. 93).

The greater part of the houses are constructed of wood, raised on a *rez-de-chaussée* – on a kind of support pillar and a foundation of brick. They are covered with shingles. All are very combustible cypress. Also, this city was accidentally burned two times over an interval of a few years, in March 1788 and in December of 1794. Despite this, they build again every day for reasons of economy a kind of large booth (*échoppes*) in the center of the town and on the residential lots of the old burned buildings, without giving thought to the dangerous consequences of this sort of construction. Everything is in cypress with the exception of the foundations, and what I assume are the fire places.

The [commercial store] houses are raised about seven or eight feet from the earth to make room for the cellars, which are on a level with the ground; for no business can be carried on below its surface on account of the surrounding waters.

The streets are well laid out, and tolerably spacious, but that is all. Bordered by a foot-way of four or five feet [wide], and throughout unpaved, walking is inconvenient; but what is more

incommodious [for] the foot-passenger is the projecting flight of steps before every door (p. 24).

There are many stairways on the banquettes, reducing the passage by one-half [This indicates that then, as now, the floors of most cottages were raised 1-2 feet above grade, and had to be accessed by short stairways placed on the banquette, itself.]

Eyewitness accounts such as these indicate that at the end of the Spanish colonial period the architectural scene in New Orleans was dominated by a smaller number of stylish multi-story store houses distributed along the levee front, Chartres and Royal Streets, while the vast majority of houses were low and built of wood, though perhaps plastered on their facades and painted white or with pastel colors. We see something of the amazing adaptability of Barthelemy Lafon when we discover that he also contributed to the forms of New Orleans Creole vernacular architecture.

The Environment of Creativity in New Orleans

The situation in which Lafon worked was one of almost unbelievable turmoil – political, social and legal. Many nagging unresolved issues stymied the Spanish colonial government in the last decades of the eighteenth century. For example, there was no agreement on the problem of who was in control of the public and private lands within the city, and who could tax, sell, dispose of, or condemn lots and buildings. Like the French before them, the Spanish had established a multi-headed form of colonial government with less-than-clear lines of authority. The idea was that if the various branches did not agree, unresolved issues would be forwarded up to the King for his decision. Ultimately, the King owned all public lands and only he could determine land grants, either through his personal council, or through an appointed local official.

In fact, the branches of government often disagreed, even on vitally important issues such as the building codes for rebuilding New Orleans following the great destructive fires. The Cabildo – the city council – theoretically embodied the right to control lands within the city in order to further to development and secure good order. Beginning with Governor O'Reilly, however, the governors exercised actual power over the control of royal lands.¹² The Cabildo remained timid in exercising control over decisions

concerning who should obtain public lands for the good of the community, and whether buildings ought to be condemned if they were fire hazards. Disputes between the Cabildo and the Governor were often submitted to the King, requiring several years to resolve.

This was particularly true for building codes. After the fire of 1788, Governor Carondelet asked the Cabildo to establish a building code which would stop the construction of large wooden structures because of their potential as fire hazards. In 1795 this was done; rules requiring that fireproof buildings be built were published.¹³ Unfortunately, the new building codes were largely ignored because they required much greater expense of materials--beyond the affordability of most residents. Brick was expensive. Good brick and tile was made on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain and better "hard" brick was imported from Philadelphia. Slate and tile were also imported by ship, multiplying the cost of a house.

When the Cabildo attempted to enforce the codes by razing a number of small temporary and highly flammable houses, successive Governors Gayoso, Casa-Calvo, and Vidal (Carondelet's successors), refused to enforce the edicts, and even argued that poor people should be exempted from the prohibition on building wooden houses. Governor Vidal, particularly, overrode the Cabildo, leaving the matter of enforcement unresolved. The matter had still not been resolved in 1803 when Spain relinquished its sovereignty over Louisiana.

However, despite their inability to enforce the new anti-fire regulations, the 1795 acts of the Cabildo did have a general effect on the vernacular architecture of New Orleans. People did plaster the fronts of their houses, often leaving the sides sheathed in exposed clapboards. Chimneys grew very tall, lessening the chance of sparks igniting a neighbor's roof. Shingles gave way to *merrains*, also called *pieux* (Figs. 5.16, 5.19, 5.26, 5.27, 5.36). These were shingle-like slabs of cypress or oak six to eight feet in length. They were so heavy that they could not be lifted by the updrafts of a house fire and transported onto neighboring structures, spreading the fire in a high wind. In addition, the regulations against building larger wooden structures facing the street meant that houses less than 30 feet in width but of considerable depth became increasingly popular. These were mostly one room wide and two to five rooms in depth, with two front doors opening directly onto the street. *Appentis* (shed-roofed) linear cottages appeared almost immediately.

More slowly but with ever-increasing acceptance, shotgun-like houses in the forms used in Saint-Domingue appeared in growing numbers (Figs. 5.25 – 5.29). The first shotguns appear in the graphic record in 1803. Lafon was recording them, both in town and in the countryside in 1804.¹⁴ They were popular with free people of color, many of whom had come from Saint-Domingue, particularly beginning in 1804.

Secret political plots in favor of the establishment of new nations or new states (Mexico, Texas, West Florida), or in favor of the United States or European countries capturing former Spanish colonies, arose. Several of the prominent architects of New Orleans became deeply enmeshed in them. Arsene Lacarrier Latour, and Barthelemy Lafon were among them. Many of their brother French Masons of New Orleans were involved in political intrigues, together with the American Masons including Arron Burr, General James Wilkinson, Governor Claiborne, and even the Spanish popular priest, Padre Antoine Sedella. He ran an espionage network for the Spanish which included Latour and perhaps, Lafon.¹⁵

Then, there were the privateers who sometimes worked with letters of mark from newly “independent” nations, and more often not. The problem was that the Spanish government, like the French government before it, had run its colonies on a strict mercantilist policy. Foreign trade was severely restricted. It was not possible to become a wealthy trader and at the same time follow the formal rules of commerce. This meant that dozens of people with the means and the daring became smugglers, privateers, and pirates. The Laffites, for example, ran a vast trading network, landing captured goods and slaves at Baratavia and transporting them through the bayous into New Orleans or other locations where they were sold. The Americans were slow to catch on to the breadth and tenacity of this form of commercial activity, but when they finally did, they discovered that even surveyors and architects such as Lafon had long been active privateers with their own armed corsairs. At different times Lafon commanded at least four armed raiders whose names have been recorded. A very substantial proportion of the commerce of New Orleans depended on such illegal activities, and it would not be forfeited easily.

Global historical events also stimulated turmoil on the local scene. The European nations were at war with one-another and with the newly minted United States. France underwent its revolution only a few years after the successful American Revolution, splitting the loyalties of the New Orleans Creoles.

Napoleon rose in France, and soon was fighting Britain, then Spain. Central and South American colonies, including Mexico, were beginning the struggle for independence from Spain. Spain was losing its power to control its colonies in North and South America, and England and the United States competed to see who would next control these vast lands. The key to much of this lay in and around New Orleans, where the war of 1812 finally arrived, launching the city onto the world stage in a most dramatic way, and paving the way for a new president for the United States. This occurred just a few years after the Haitian Revolution reached its crescendo sending forty to fifty thousand French refugees to other parts of the Atlantic World, including Baltimore, Philadelphia and Charleston. New Orleans would not be far behind.

Then, there were technological advances such as the development of the steam engine. Robert Fulton's first successful steamboat, the "New Orleans," reached New Orleans from Pittsburgh in 1811. The steamboat alone would revolutionize the commerce and multiply the wealth of New Orleanians, attracting vast numbers of Anglo-Americans who poured into the city to seek their fortunes. The crystallization of sugar (1796) and the development of the cotton gin (1794) transformed the agriculture of the state into a wealth-producing powerhouse, requiring new institutions such as banking houses, commercial exchanges, auction houses, slave auctions, newspapers and coffee houses. Hotels would soon rise up, but before that, the demand for rooming houses and hostels would revolutionize the economy of the middle classes including the very large population of free people of color. All of this and much more meant that New Orleans held, in these years, the most dynamic society in the United States. Such transformations in concert could not help but exert a powerful influence on the changing architectural scene.

Vernacular Architecture of New Orleans in the Early American Republic

But what, exactly, do we know about the architecture of New Orleans at the very end of the Spanish colonial period and thereafter? No one has, to our knowledge, published an authoritative study of the architecture of New Orleans between 1795 and 1810. Sam Wilson, Jr. wrote several histories of New Orleans architecture which dealt, largely, with the larger and more elegant aspects of the built environment, but without much comment on the vernacular.¹⁶ The vernacular consisted mostly of smaller single-story

wooden houses or those with walls of brick or *bousillage* (mud mixed with Spanish moss) between heavy timber posts. There was considerable diversity. Much of this reflected the various traditions of the settlers and immigrants. Luckily, we have a considerable amount of information about the cultural landscape of New Orleans in the critical decade of 1795-1805. An estimated two dozen structures still stand in New Orleans from that period, though most have undergone substantial changes from their original appearance. In addition, a greater number of Spanish colonial buildings survived to be drawn, photographed and otherwise recorded in the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth centuries. New Orleans is unique in having the plan book plans which record in great detail many hundreds buildings being publically auctioned throughout the nineteenth century. Some 1600 illustrations are found in the New Orleans Notarial Archives. Some of these record not only the plans but the elevations of buildings constructed in our target decade of 1795 to 1805.

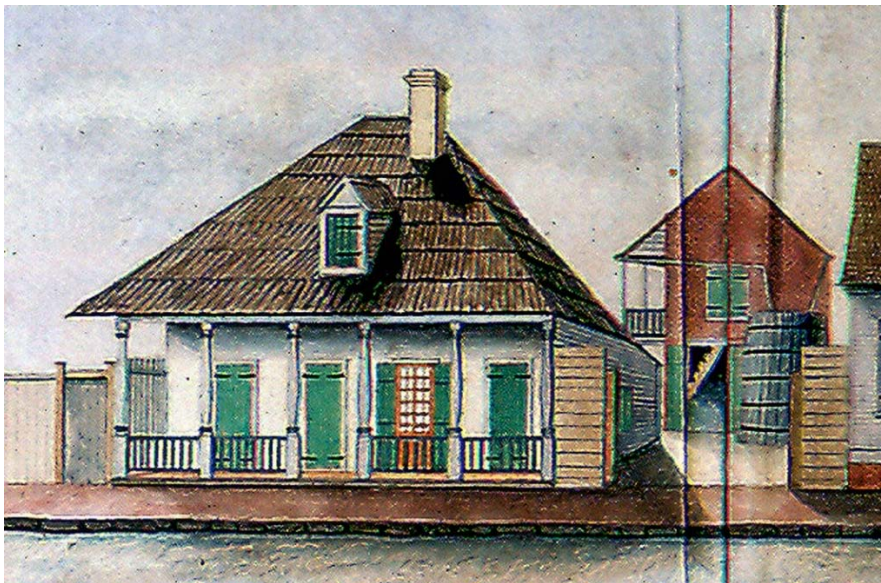


Fig. 5.16. A pavilion-roofed Creole Cottage on Race Street in the Lower Garden District. The estimated date of construction is 1790 (the New Orleans Notarial Archive). The roof is covered in *merrains*. The Creole style borrows heavily from the West Indies. NONA 044.041.

The population of New Orleans was extremely diverse, coming from a wide variety of circumatlantic locations. Its vernacular architecture reflected in many ways the diversity of this Atlantic-wide population. Influences can be seen

coming from France and Spain, but also from Cap Haïtien, Santiago and Havana, Cuba, Mexico, and even coastal West Africa and places as far removed as colonial Brazil.

Lafon's surveys reveal many aspects of this architecture, but they must be combined with other information to reveal a full portrait of each building. Because the sketches of buildings on these property surveys are mere indications, rather than architectural drawings, many open questions remain. There is no way to tell exactly how each of these buildings functioned. We drew conclusions about function based upon those better surveys conducted for legal property transfers. The *affiches*, or posters, which advertised the sale of a property contain far more information and make clear which buildings are functioning as residences, as doubles, or as commercial enterprises. Unfortunately, only a few of these more complete surveys were made prior to 1804. Nevertheless, we are fortunate to have been able to add to the store of knowledge about the architecture of New Orleans at the beginning of the territorial period. This is a body of data which will, no doubt, be expanded in the future. The total of our surveys have been combined in a map of the surveys, constructed by Gabriele Richardson (Map 4.20).¹⁷

The Types of Vernacular Architecture in New Orleans 1795 – 1810. Outside of the commercial area, New Orleans had a wide variety of cottage and commercial types, giving the street scene a complex, ever-changing appearance. This general *tout ensemble* is brought home through a later nineteenth sketch by A. R. Woad (Fig. 5.17).



Fig. 5.17. Quartier Français, 1867, by A.R. Woad. Image courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection (1965.73). Houses in the foreground are of the types common to the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century.

In order to simplify a complex story, we divide the forms of New Orleans vernacular architecture into several basic classes.

- 1) **French Colonial Vernacular Cottages.** Since the founding of the city in 1718, French settlers had often constructed unmodified French style country and town houses in Louisiana. These have all but disappeared from the New Orleans landscape, but there remain good illustrations of several houses which could have been put down in any village in western France without raising comment. Vernacular cottages are distinguished by both their overall form and by the geometry of their floorplans. In the case of eighteenth century cottages from Western France, they were mostly characterized by the local medieval plan -- the *salle-et-chambre* (Figs. 5.18, 5.19). It combined a near square all-purpose main room (*salle*) with a narrower master bedroom (*chamber*). This places the chimney off-center. These cottages did not originally have a rear cabinet-loggia range of rooms, but of course, that is something which might easily be added at a later time.



Fig. 5.18. A French style cottage at house at 740 Esplanade Ave., corner Bourbon. This sketch by A. R. Waud was drafted in 1871, Courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection. The plan is *salle-et-chambre*, very popular in French vernacular architecture.

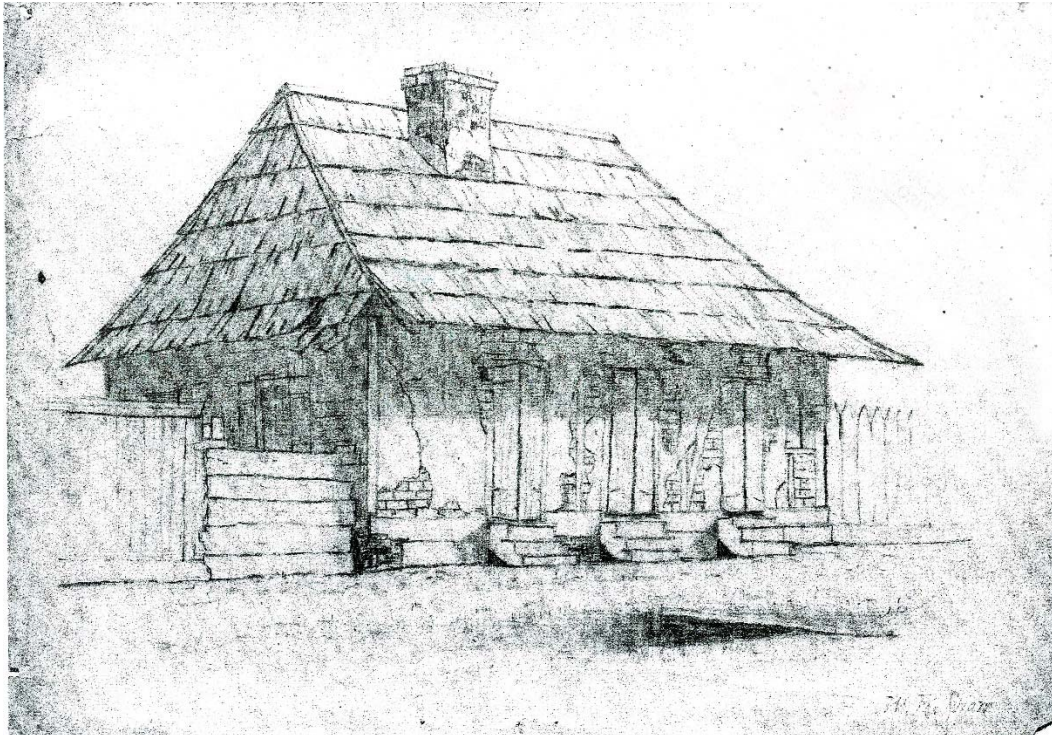


Fig. 5.19. A sketch of a 3-bay *salle-et-chambre* cottage on "Washington," perhaps St. Roch Ave., by W.R. Shaw in the nineteenth century. Image courtesy HNOC (1983.170.10).

2) **Spanish Colonial Vernacular Cottages.** Following the two fires, the new architecture ordinances of the Cabildo required that roofs be covered with tile or slate. The Spanish-influenced architects such as Guillemard, and those Spanish colonial officials and businessmen who designed their own houses, built them much in the style of Spanish cottages in other parts of Latin America. There were two basic types. The first was the cottage with the *azotea*, or terrace roof. These were once very common, though only two survive today in the French Quarter. Barthelemy Lafon designed several of them in the 1790s when he purchased land in the 700 block of Dumaine Street. Dr. John Sibley described the abundance of terrace roofed cottages and houses in his diary, quoted above.



Fig. 5.20. Two terrace-roofed cottages at 707-709 and 711- Dumaine Street (far right side of image). These were probably designed and built by Barthelemy Lafon in 1799. The cottage at the far right, the de la Torre house, survives. The cottage in the left-middle of the image also originally had a terrace roof which was covered over with a pitched roof at some later time, probably in the first decade of the 19th century. Sketch by Joseph Pennell.

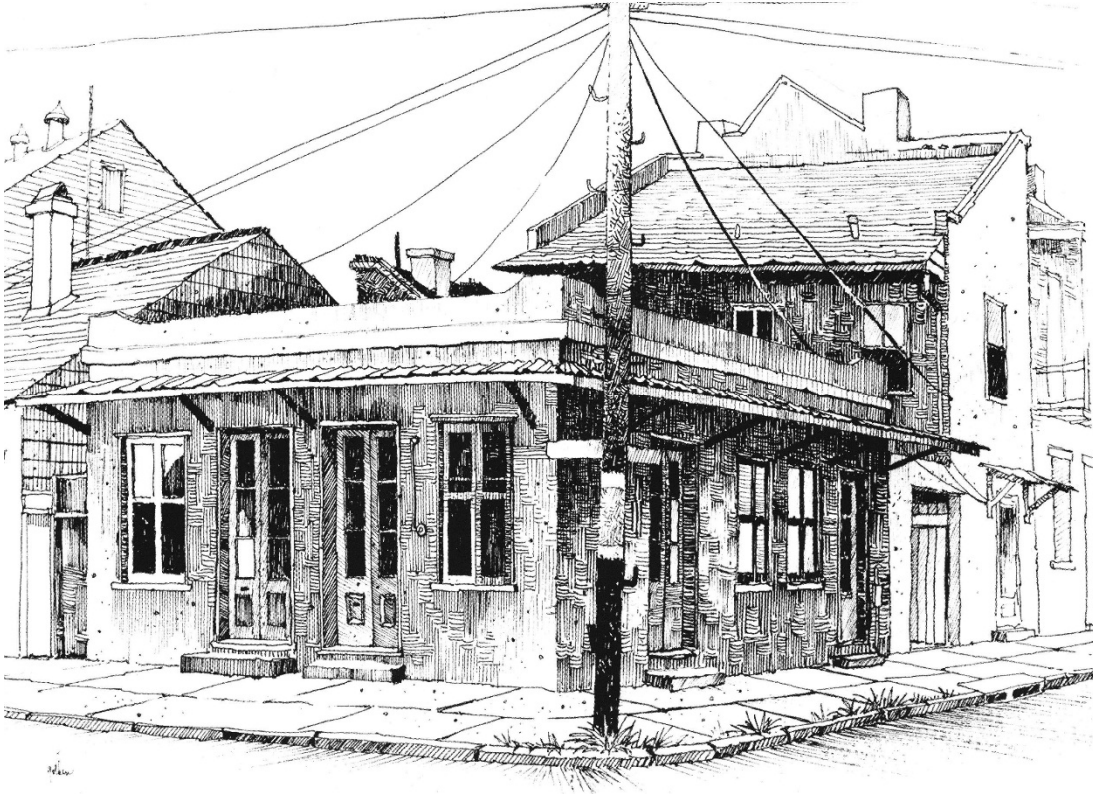


Fig. 5.21. Terraced-roofed Cottage Antoine (Abat), 838-840 Governor Nicholls Street, corner Dauphine. House built for Franchonette Decoudreau, f.c.l., by Carlos Decondreaux, Captain of the regiment at the Plaza de Armas.¹⁸

Some of the Spanish style cottages were creolized, either originally or later, through the addition of a cabinet-loggia range of rooms. That is the plan of the Cottage Antoine (Fig. 5.21).

The second form of Spanish cottage was one which typically had four bays on the street, and a semi-double or a four-square room plan. Some were larger and used for commercial purposes. These cottages often had low-pitched hip or gable roofs, but a few had steeper roofs like those of the French Creole cottages. Many were recorded in the nineteenth century.

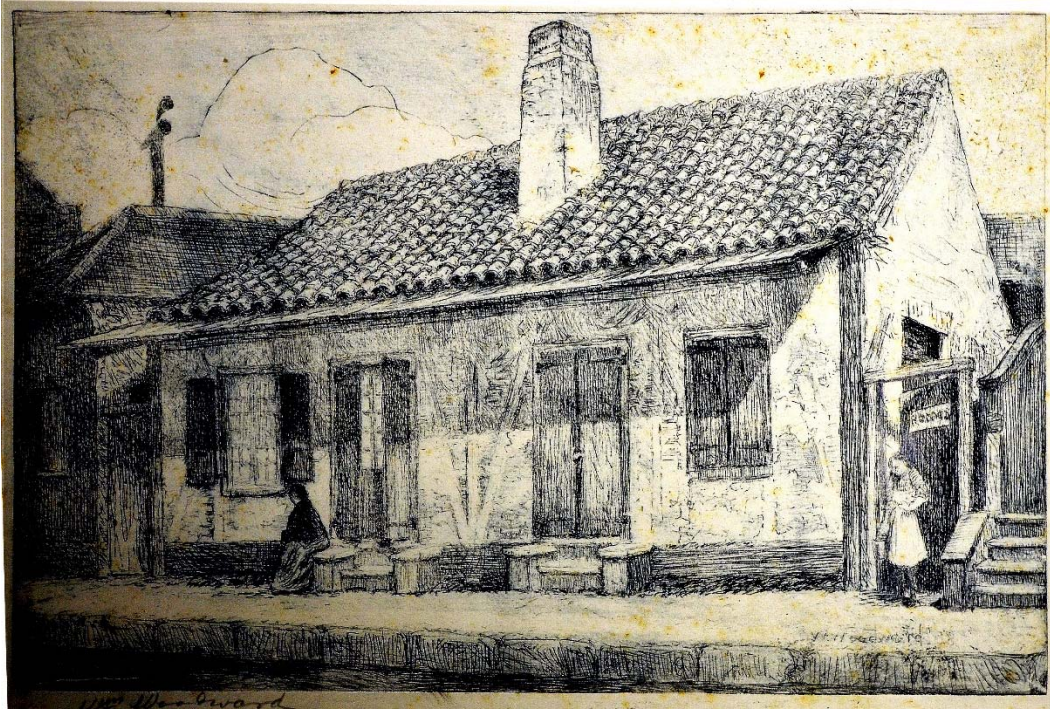


Fig. 5.22. A Spanish colonial gable-sided cottage on Dumaine Street. Sketch by Wm Woodward, ca. 1904. Image courtesy New Orleans Museum of Art (61.16).

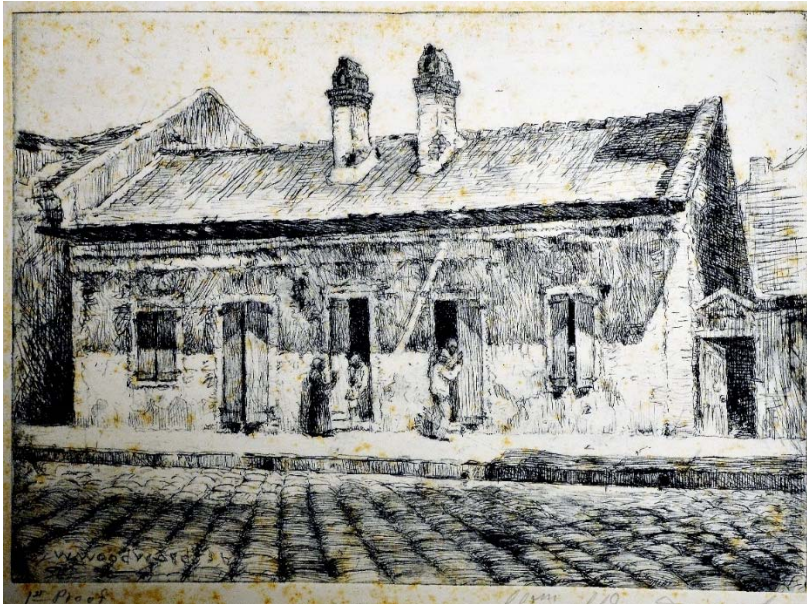


Fig. 5.23. A double cottage with platibanda. Sketch by Wm Woodward, 1904 (NOMA 39.31). The location was not recorded, and the cottage no longer exists.



Fig. 5.24. The brick-walled Spanish house at 1038-40 Chartres Street at the corner of Ursulines. This cottage which survived well into the twentieth century was a commercial form of the Spanish cottage. Photo taken in 1917. Image courtesy the Vieux Carre Survey (1020NO724).

3) Linear Cottages. No less than three separate kinds of linear cottages existed in the 1795 – 1805 decade. These were Spanish style *appentis* cottages, rotated French cottages with their narrow ends towards the street, and *ti kay*, or shotgun houses in the style of Saint-Domingue.

For example, Lafon’s survey of the La Rionda cottage at 535 Saint Philip Street in 1808: “A house of 18 feet front, brick in front and brick between posts on the sides and rear, tile roof, four *appartements* plus a [freestanding] kitchen, pigeon house and well.” All of the structures are apparent in Lafon’s survey (Fig. 5.25). The 1812 written description of this property was penned when it was sold by José Antone La Rionda. It indicates that the linear cottage house is of a single story in height. Raised houses are always described as such (*à étage*). It is described as having a tile roof before it was demolished ca. 1833.

Linear cottages came in both single and double widths, particularly after ca. 1805 (Fig. 5.28). They would have been covered with *merrains* (huge shingles), which gave their roofs a distinctive appearance. The rooms of many were relatively small, only 12-14 feet wide. They were often crowded together on very narrow lots and mixed with tiny Creole Cottages and other forms.

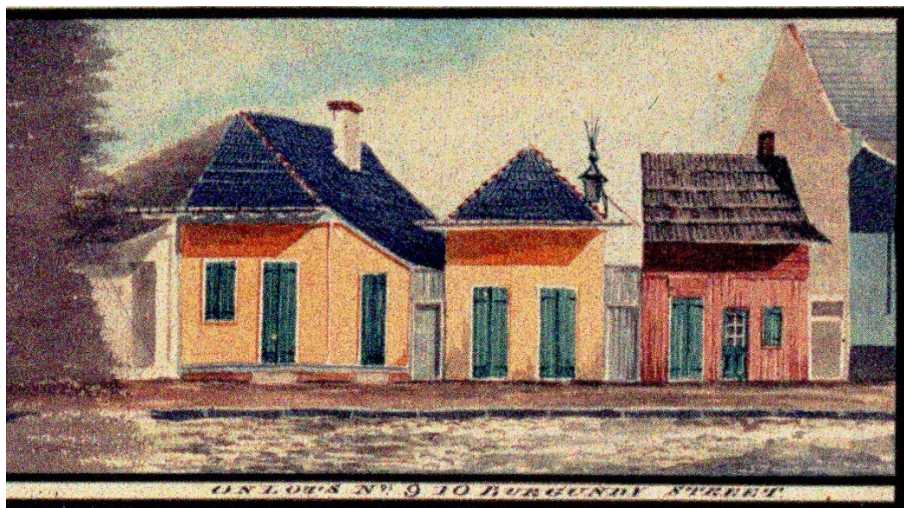
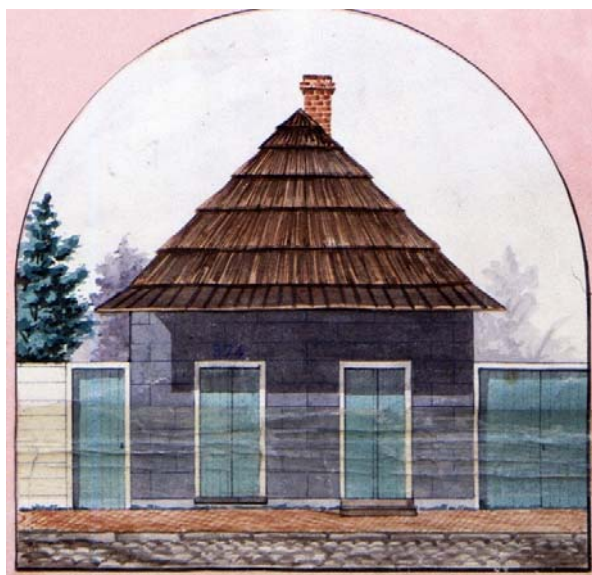


Fig. 5.26. A set of small, early Territorial Period cottages crowded together in the 600 block of Burgundy Street (Square 89). They are, from left to right, an *apprentis* cottage (paired with another), a *ti-kay* linear cottage, and a tiny creole cottage covered with *merrains*. Detail of NONA image 006.110.



Figs. 5.27 and 5.28. Examples of two forms of early linear cottage, both covered with *merrains*. The single wide cottage on the left was built by Pierre Roup, a Saint-Domingue refugee and builder who arrived in New Orleans ca. 1805. This house was located at 1744 N. Rampart Street, and is no longer standing (NONA 089.024). The cottage on the right is the ca. 1810 Phillipon Cottage, which still stands on Dauphine Street in a somewhat changed appearance (NONA 044.035).

Just how did these cottages unite into a streetscape? That differed in different parts of the city. In the city center, for example, it was often older French style cottages rotated with their narrow ends towards the street on narrow lots which were interspersed with small hip-roofed cottages.

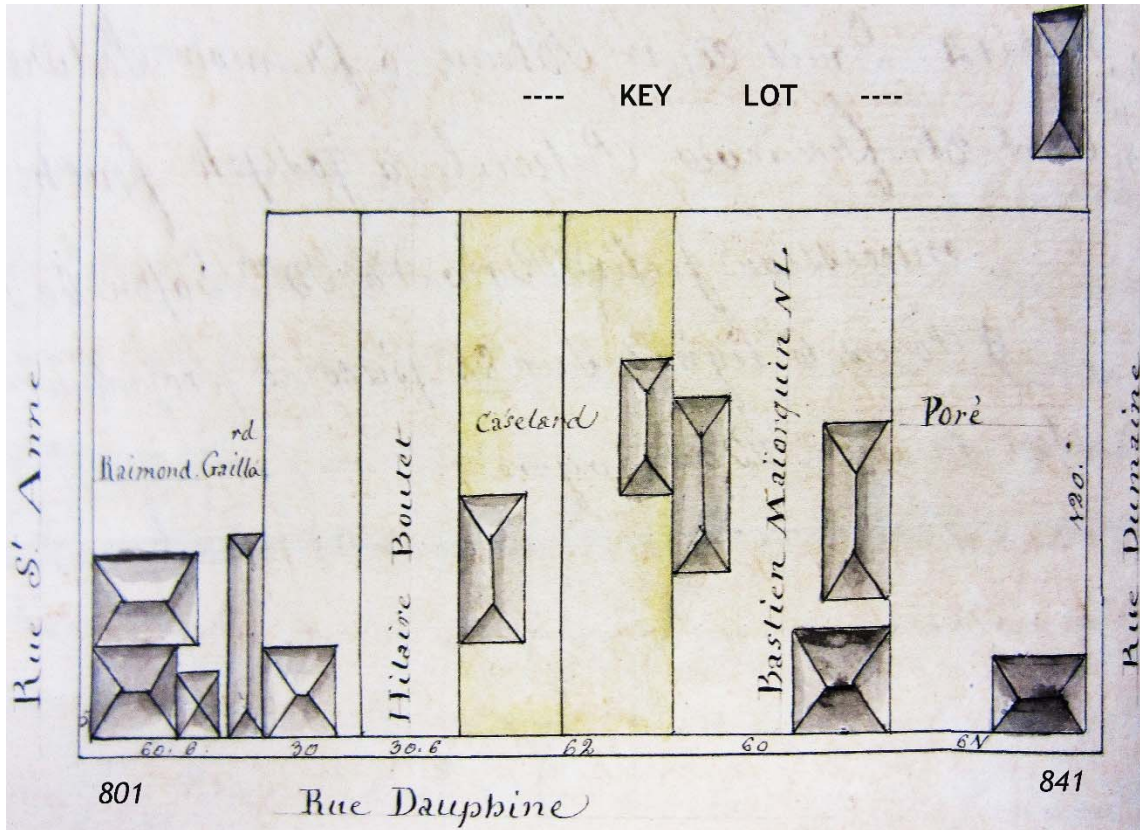


Fig. 5.29. Barthélemy Lafon's 1804 survey of the 800 block of Dauphine (Vol. 1, page 49). Here we see linear cottages mixed together with Creole cottages, mostly set on 30 foot wide half lots.

Square 86, seen in this survey, appears not to have burned in either of the fires. Some of the buildings standing here might predate 1788, but most probably do not because this was not a built-up area of the city in that year. Three of the properties are original 60 foot wide lots, while the other two have been subdivided into *demi-terrains*. The linear cottages may have the floorplans of French style cottages turned sideways to better accommodate the increasingly narrow lots. Five of the cottages in this survey appear to have either four-square floorplans or *semi-double* plans, similar to other post-fire cottages. The elongated structure on the lot of Raimond Gaillard appears to be a service structure, rather than a shotgun house.

The other form of linear cottage popular from Spanish colonial times was the *appentis*, or shed roofed cottage (Fig. 5.26). Appentis cottages were, historically, dependencies. Even in the post fire years when they have been brought up to the street and fitted out as linear cottages, they are often still connected with larger houses (Fig. 5.30).

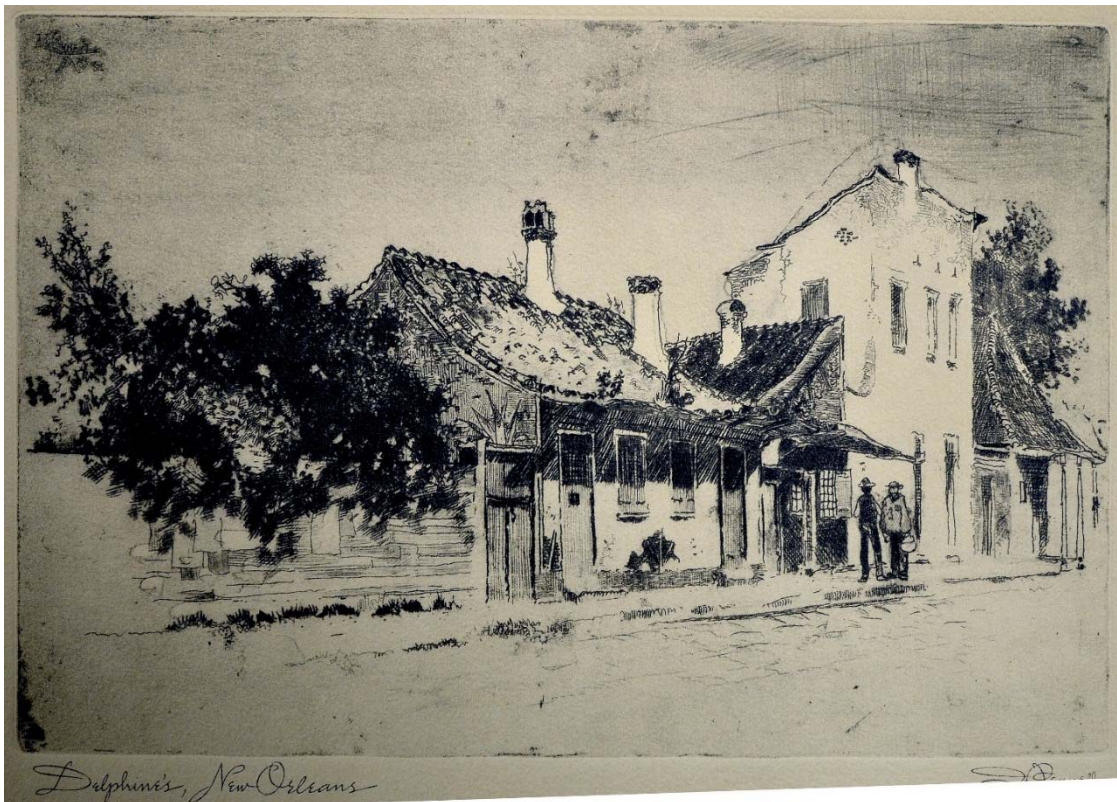


Fig. 5.30. A nineteenth century Joseph Pennell sketch of “Madame Delphine’s cottage” in the 1200 block of Royal Street. Here the Creole cottage at 1220 Royal is conjoined with a Spanish style gable-fronted *appentis* linear cottage (1216 Royal). The tall chimneys are reminiscent of the first decade of American Louisiana. The cottage was described in a George Washington Cable short story “Madame Delphine,” in *Old Creole Days*. New Orleans Museum of Art (91.440).

There are indications that larger streetscape units were becoming important in these years. That is, houses were designed with their locations in mind in order to create an overall effect more pleasing to the eye, and more convenient to pedestrians. There appears to be several possible explanations for the common curiosity of low cottages with roofs which combine a hip on one end with a gable on the other end. They almost always appear at the ends of a block. In other words, these curious rooflines are associated with

houses set on corner lots. It is as if someone has passed a rule that hip-roofs occur at the corners, and gabled roofs where houses adjoin one-another in the middle of a square. One example occurs at both ends of the 1200 block of Bourbon between Governor Nicholls (then *Rue de l'Hôpital*) and Barracks (*Rue de Quartier*). The gable roof was meant to align with the close-set gable-roofed cottages on the adjoining properties, usually on half lots. This is precisely what they do in Lafon's 1804 survey. In all, the lakeside of Bourbon Street (Square 79 -- 1200 block) has three gabled roof cottages in the interior of the block, plus a half-gabled cottage at each end of the block (Fig. 5.31). This is all the more curious in that these are all small houses built on half-lots. Poor people generally do not coordinate the architecture of their houses with their neighbors. One possible explanation is that what we are witnessing is the hand of a developer who has purchased most of an entire block (or square), divided it into multiple lots and designed houses which conform to an overall plan. The conforming houses are all roughly the same depth, while two houses which do not conform are of different depths, and clearly part of a different philosophy of architectural integration -- a more highly individualistic one befitting an earlier state of urbanization.¹⁹

Modern street numbers have been added by the authors. Image courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection. Another explanation for this phenomenon is the *abat vent* theory -- gable-roofed buildings set right at the edge of the banquette on corner properties would not as conveniently offer roof extensions over the banquette on both street sides as hip roofs do (Fig. 5.32).

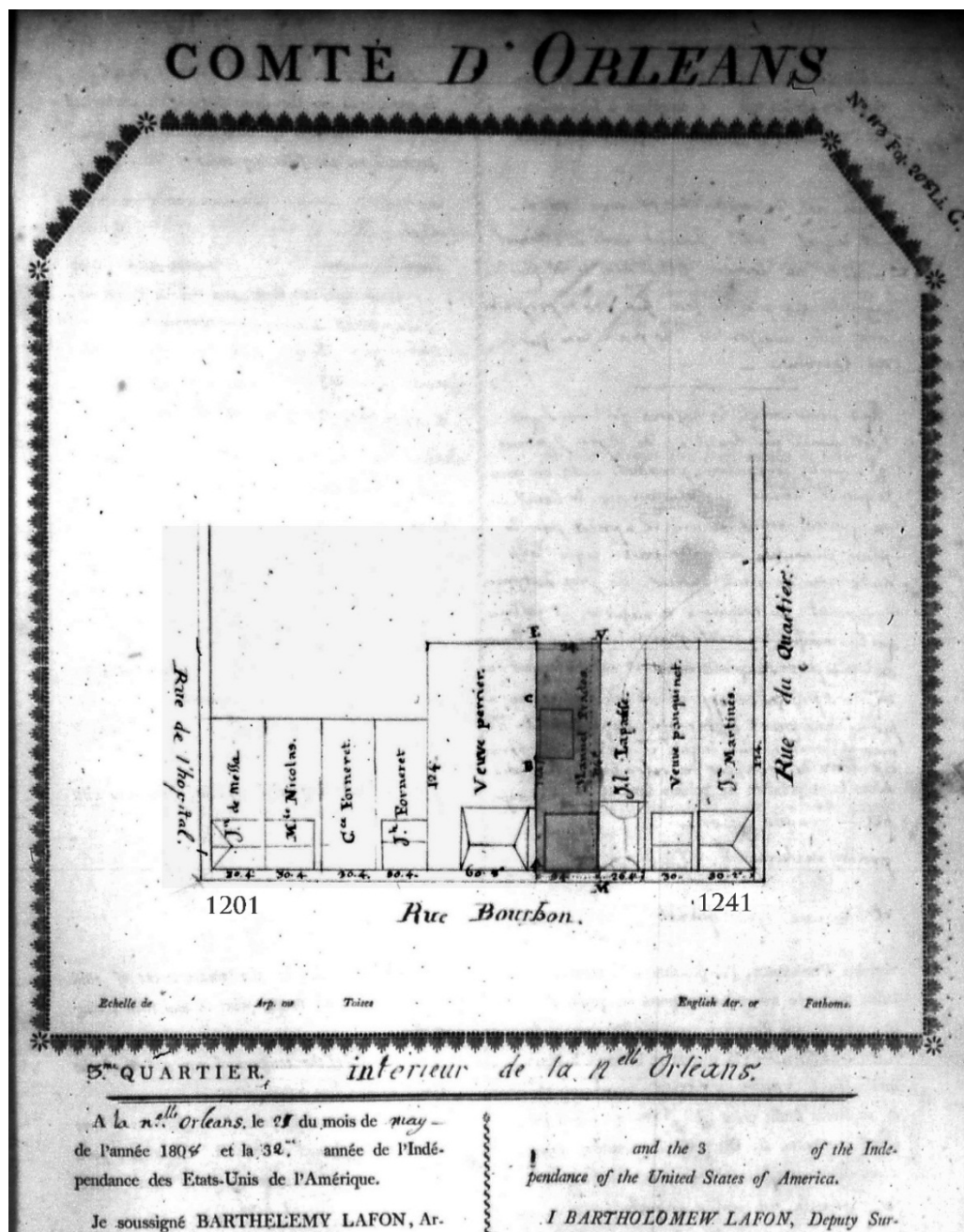


Fig. 5.31 A Lafon Survey of Square 79 and the 1200 block of Bourbon, taken May 2, 1804. Survey Book No. 2 (HNOC No. 113, Fol. 208). The corner cottages have gabled roofs facing the adjoining cottages, which are, themselves, gabled roof cottages.



Fig. 5.32. 739-741 Bourbon, a half-hip, half-gabled roof corner cottage at the intersection of Bourbon and St. Ann Streets. 739 Bourbon Street functions as a corner store. The *abat vent* wraps around the corner. Many other corner cottages have a similar configuration JDE Photo 2014.

- 4) **Creole Cottages and Creolized Cottages.** The building types just described are all “pure” types, relatively unmodified from their previously established origins in France and colonial Spanish America. Even the *appentis* linear cottages are direct descendants of the rear shed-roofed service buildings of Parisian town houses. However, the nature of vernacular architecture in New Orleans was changing rapidly in this period. By 1804, and much more-so by 1815, the majority of vernacular buildings were no longer old colonial types. Creole architecture had become dominant, and even small vernacular buildings were undergoing creolization. This was almost certainly due to the enormous influx of refugees streaming out of both Saint-Domingue and other French colonies, and from Cuba. Temporary architecture, impermanent architecture, the architecture of poverty, and refugee architecture were ubiquitous and dramatically variable. Most houses were not based directly on previously established types. Rather, they were thrown up quickly by people in need of shelter but without much money. Few artists were attracted by this humble and chaotic form of architecture, though it was surely abundant.

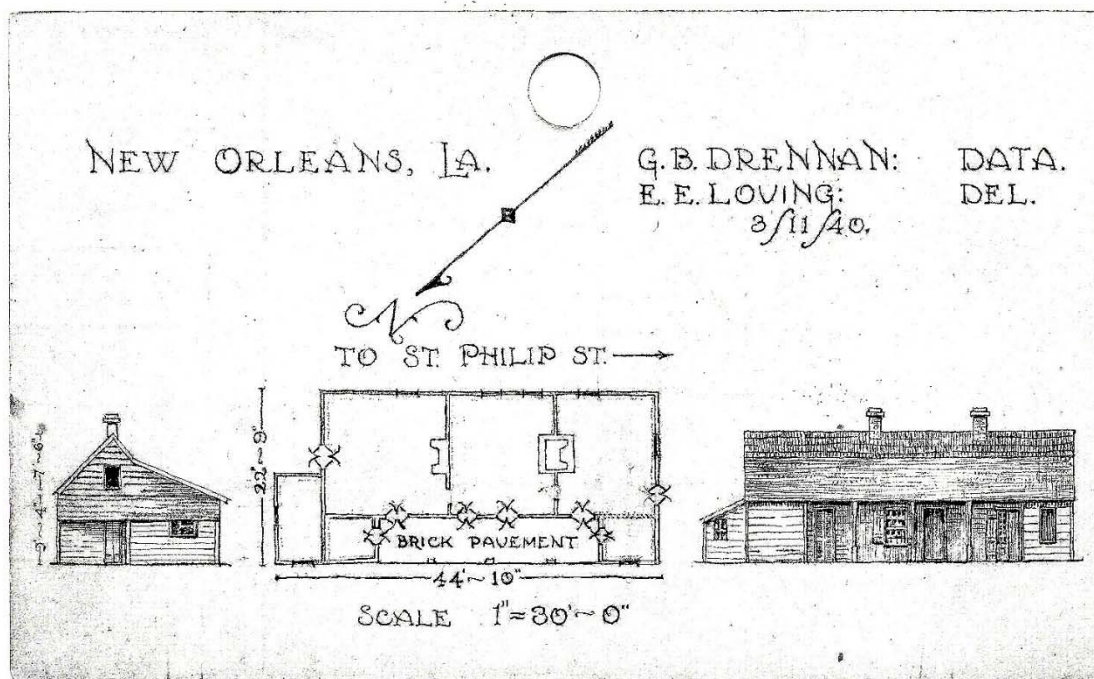


Fig. 5.33. Troxler Cottage, 919 St. Philip Street. This is small creolized cottage which has had a cabinet-loggia added to one side, creating an asymmetrical profile. The core of the house was built in 1782. The rooms are about 16 feet square. Image courtesy the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress: HABS card (verso) sketches by E. E. Loving, 1940.

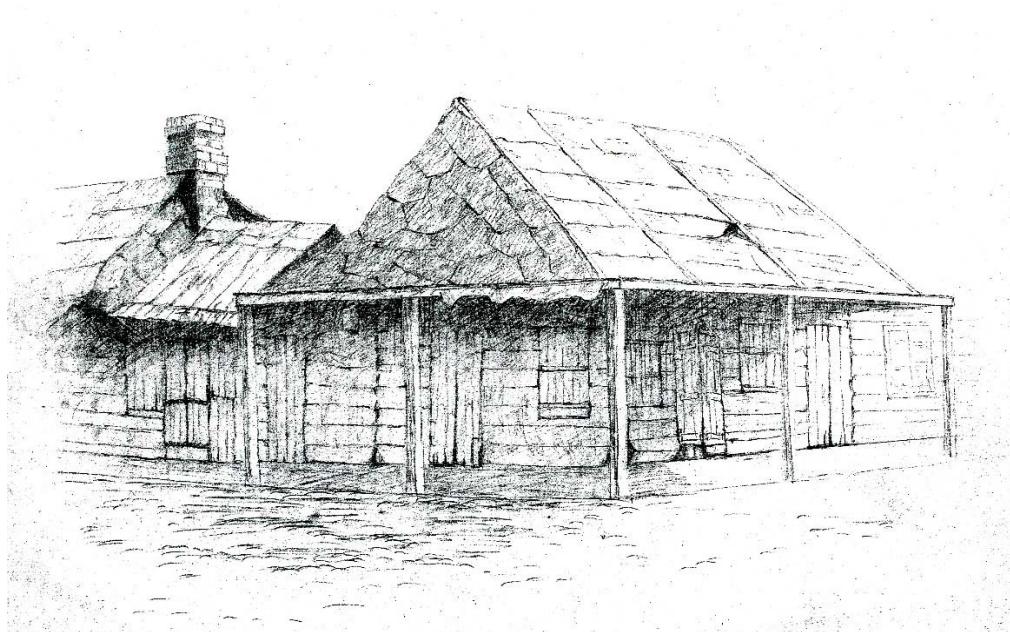


Fig. 5.34. A small corner cottage located at the corner of St. Ann and Burgundy streets. The roofs are covered with sheets of bark. 19th century sketch by W.R. Shaw, courtesy Historic New Orleans Collection (1983.170.7).

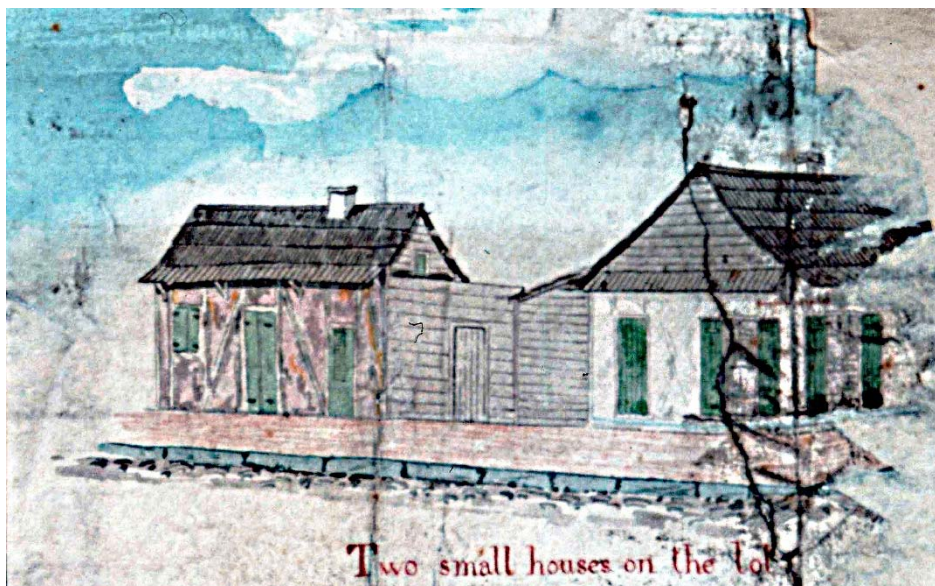


Fig. 5.35. Small cottages at 941 Governor Nicholls corner Burgundy Street on a very small lot. The smaller cabin is built with *bousillage entre poteaux* (mud and moss between posts). The roofs are covered with *merrains*. HABS 094.044.

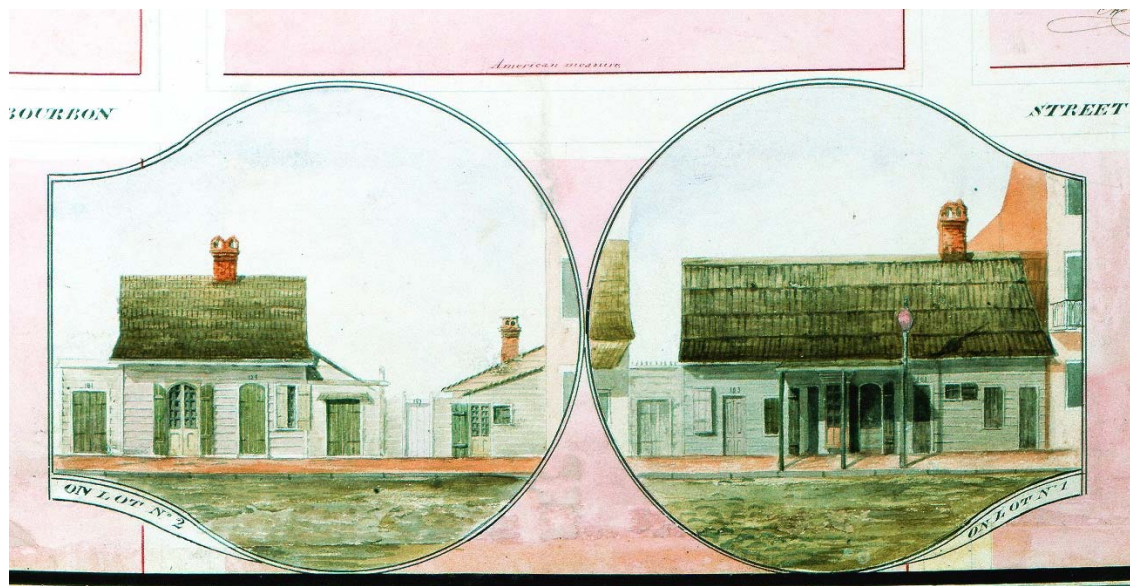


Fig. 5.36. A pair of Spanish or early American period cottages in the 700 block of Conti Street. HABS 035.057.

Houses such as these would have been seen throughout the back of town areas of New Orleans in the first decade of the American period. They conformed to no definite tradition and no established plan types, but through time they were gradually expanded and creolized with galleries and cabinet-loggia rooms.

The sources of much of the patterns of creolization are plain. Very high levels of seaborne communication occurred between Spanish Latin America, the French West Indian colonies, and New Orleans. When the American military finally got around to raiding the Baratavia base of the Laffite brothers and their associates in 1814, they captured no less than twenty-two armed brigs and schooners which had been actively engaged in smuggling and privateering across the Gulf and the Caribbean, and that does not include the ones that got away.²⁰ This event speaks to the high levels of interaction occurring between New Orleans and the circum-Caribbean.

Between 1803 and 1815, the population of New Orleans roughly tripled, with a very high proportion of the increase coming from long-established Creole plantation societies in the West Indies. Because the colonies of Saint-Domingue and Cuba were colonized some two centuries before the Gulf Coast, they had successfully adapted their lifeways and their architecture to the peculiarities of the climate. Levels of cultural interchange between places such as Jamaica, Saint-Domingue, Cuba, Spanish Santo Domingo, and the islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Saint Christopher exceeded in many ways the amount of cultural influence exerted by their European mother countries. It would not be an exaggeration to refer to a large body of synthesized and established architectural practice as an Atlantic World Creole tradition. Of course, in the hands of individual nations -- the French, the Spanish, the Portuguese the Dutch, and the British -- this shared body of practice was modified in the direction of locally established heritages. Carpentry techniques, for example, remained within the tradition of each mother country while architectural forms adapted to local needs, so they diffused freely across national boundaries.

It is now clear that adaptive architectural innovations introduced from the colonies of one nation diffused rapidly to most other tropical colonial places in the Atlantic World. Everyone everywhere aspired to the latest styles. Architectural innovations such as raising houses several feet above ground level to improve through-ventilation, or the use of broad living galleries as all-purpose living and reception rooms -- these ideas spread throughout the entire West Indies within a

decade or so of their introduction. This was especially true of the decades of the 1640s and 1650s, when sugar technology and industrial-level slavery were combined, resulting in the enormous growth of large-scale plantation enterprises in the colonies of the European nations. As ever-increasing waves of skilled and knowledgeable people from the West Indian sugar colonies descended upon Louisiana in the period between the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, they transported with them all of the wisdom of centuries of shared West Indian experience – in a word, Creole culture.

As early as 1804, that influence had already transformed much of the built environment of New Orleans, and that was only the beginning. Creole traditions made their impact on New Orleans in several ways. The forms and geometries of several successful West Indian vernacular houses were imported directly into New Orleans. Creole cottages and shotgun houses were among the most successful transplants. These, we would term, Creole architectural forms. Even more widespread, however, were newly borrowed decorative features and geometric forms. West Indian patterns were reformulated and reimagined into new adaptive elements of design which promoted higher levels of comfort and newly relevant symbolic associations. We refer to the borrowing of old patterns into new formulations as the creolization of established forms. Both processes operated simultaneously. Selected popular West Indian houses were adopted as complete forms more easily into Louisiana because they shared commonalities with previously established colonial forms long familiar to the local Creoles. The shotgun house (*ti-kay* of Saint-Domingue) was more easily adopted because the *appentis* shed roofed linear cottage was already established after the second great fire. Individual features, too, deriving from the West Indies, were inserted into older colonial and newer Creole forms in New Orleans, establishing locally relevant architectural styles which played new roles for the residents. The *abat* vent had been popular in the houses of colonial Cap Haïtien. Pilasters at the edges of the façade were employed in the same town to help buttress the walls of vernacular houses against the frequent earthquakes, before they were adopted in New Orleans as framing devices for the platibanda. All of this was occurring as Barthelemy Lafon was engaged in active architectural

practice, and he was much influenced by it, adopting Creole features into his commissions. Rather than simply borrowing forms from high style architecture, Lafon broadened his perspective and engaged, as did most other local builders, in the vernacular creolization process.

Beginning about 1804 we see the introduction of a new form of urban cottage into New Orleans. As Wilson pointed out, it consisted of a four-square room floorplan with a cabinet-loggia range of rooms behind. Only occasionally was a full width front gallery added to the front of this house type. Rather, the *abat vent* substituted as both sun-shade and rain-shade. In its early years the loft of the Creole cottage would not be used as living space. Beginning in the late eighteen teens we find these cottages adopting taller roofs with dormer windows for lofts. In the past. Single story urban cottages had been mostly of the standard French *semi-double* floorplan (Fig. 5.37, left side), or they were one single *appartement* room deep, with, perhaps a front gallery (Fig. 5.38). The roofs were low-pitched and the lofts were not used for living space. Now entirely new floorplans were becoming popular.

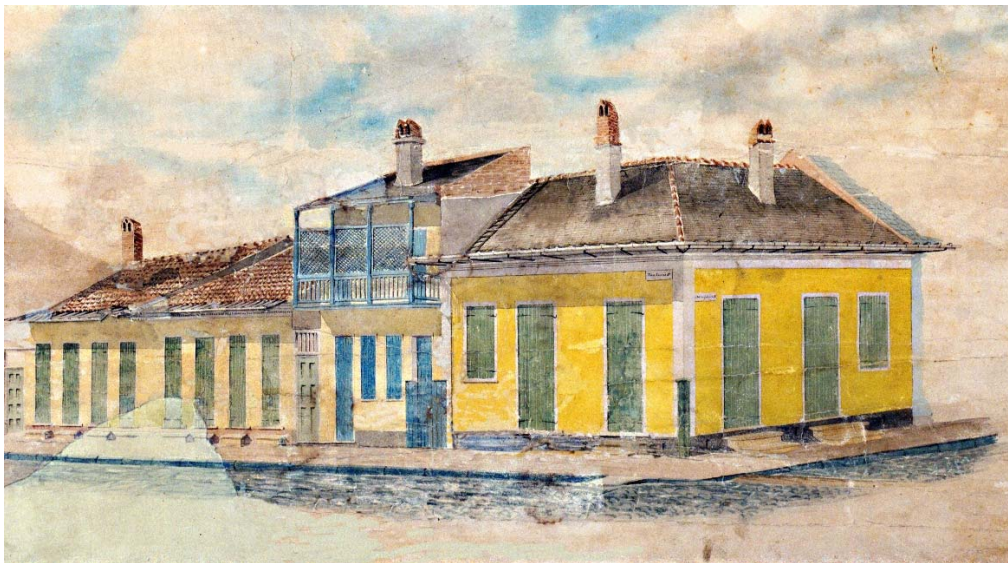


Fig. 5.37. A view of 901-915 Toulouse Street seen from the corner of Dauphine Street, Square 89, ca 1806-1811. Note the corner cottage with its hip roof and double *abat vents*. It also has a *platibanda*. Further up Toulouse is a two-story kitchen building and two gable-sided Creole cottages with semi-double floor plans, low-pitched tile roofs and tall chimneys. NONA image 045.034.

Although it was painted in May of 1852 by Charles A. de Armas, this corner of Toulouse and Dauphine streets bears all the appearance of the first decade of the nineteenth century (Fig. 5.37). The corner store, built for Barthelemy Campanel, h.c.l., might have been constructed as early as 1806, when he acquired the property. All of these buildings are extant and pretty much in their original forms, except that the corner store has lost its tall chimneys and the cottage at 909-911 Toulouse has had its façade replaced with concrete blocks. A two story kitchen building at 905-907 Toulouse accompanies the corner cottage. Beyond that are two classic Creole cottages with symmetrical semi-double floorplans. The price of the two corner properties rose from \$3,500.00 in 1806 to \$10,000.00 in 1811, when Campanel sold them (temporarily) to Barthelemy Duverge. The houses were built brick between posts and covered with tiles.²¹ Lafon's 1804 survey of Square 89 shows no buildings standing on any of the four *terrains* (lots) which contain the present buildings. The owner of the two corner lots is listed as Jacob Moquin.²²



Fig. 5.38. The Barthelemy Campanel cottage No. 2, at 913-915 Toulouse. This cottage was built between 1806 and 1811. It is an example of a Hispanicized French Colonial style cottage. These two houses rest on half lots, and so measure about 27 French feet in width, each.

What these buildings show is the configuration of typical Hispanicized colonial urban cottages just prior to the impact of strong architectural influences from the vernacular architecture of Saint-Domingue were becoming manifest in New Orleans. The cottages are built brick-between-posts. Their main front rooms of most are comparatively small by later standards, measuring roughly 13 Ft. wide by 12 or 13 feet deep. The rear semi-double rooms are only 9 to 10 feet deep. The two cottages exhibit features which would continue to be found on hundreds of later Creole cottages in New Orleans. They both originally had four doors opening onto the street. This improved the through-ventilation of the house. The floorplans were rigidly symmetrical. Symmetry in a floorplan is a sign that renaissance ideas were being adopted into the vernacular. This occurred in the colony of Saint-Domingue early, and it was then being adopted into the cottages of New Orleans. But, there was no cabinet loggia arrangement behind the semi-double rooms, indicating that local European rather than West Indian Creole aesthetic was dominant.

Only a few years later and just around the corner from the Barthelemy Campanel properties stood the Arsène Latour *atelier* (workshop), at 625-27 Rue Dauphine. Between 1808 and 1812, the property was the office of Arsène Lacarrière, Latour (architect, engineer), and Jean Hyacinthe Laclotte (architect, builder). They purchased it in 1811. Claude Gurlie (builder) acquired the property in 1813, following the dissolution of the Latour-Laclotte partnership. This cottage is an early example of all of the features of the classic West Indian derived Creole cottage. It is decorated with a platibanda, surmounted by a cymantia (cornice with complex curvilinear profile) and an *abat vent*. In New Orleans, these elements had begun to symbolize (French) Creole identity, as against Anglo-American allegiance. The roof of the small cottage is now sufficiently steep to enclose a sleeping loft, lighted by twin dormer windows. The floorplan is exactly that described by Sam Wilson Jr., for the classic Creole Cottage.

The majority of the houses erected during this post-colonial period were of the type that has come to be called the “Creole cottage.” Although the one story cottage was not a new idea, the typical square plan divided into four rooms by intersecting partitions, with a recessed

rear gallery flanked by small rooms called “cabinets”, seems to have come into general use during this period [1803-1820]. The ceiling heights were fairly low so that the wide overhanging roof or separate awning-like projection protected the sidewalk and the front wall of the house from sun and rain. The fairly steep roofs covered with tiles or shingles, rarely with slate, were constructed with a straight ridge parallel to the street, gables at either end. Kitchen and servants’ quarters were in detached buildings, often of two stories, in the rear.... The plan may have been introduced by refugees from San Domingo (Haiti), for houses of this type on that island are described in Moreau de St. Mery’s “Partie Française de Saint-Domingue.”²³

Cabinet-loggia arrangements were introduced into the Island of Hispaniola as early as 1510 by Diego Colon, the second son of Christopher. They appear in smaller Spanish Caribbean Creole houses such as the House Where Mila Lives (Matanzas, Cuba), and the Broussard-Laguehaye House (Plaine du nord, Haiti), both ca. 1600. They only appear in Louisiana in plantation style houses such as the Pitot House on Bayou St. John in the late 1790s.²⁴ In Hispaniola, the loggia – open towards the rear – was used as a substitute dining room in the hot months. As in Louisiana, the kitchen was located in a detached building behind the main house.

These geometrical (and social) features of Louisiana’s Creole architecture derived mostly from Saint-Domingue, some by way of Cuba. There, in the Oriente, thousands of French refugees from the Haitian Revolution fled and settled between 1792 and 1809, before moving on to New Orleans -- May to August, 1809. We should not forget, however, that trade and migration occurred continuously at very high levels between the West Indies and Louisiana, even when revolution and war was not the principal stimulant.

Sam Wilson, Jr., was prescient in this description. The introduction of the cabinet-loggia range of rooms into smaller New Orleans Creole cottages occurred late. Our earliest evidence of the appearance of this new form of cottage takes place following the arrival of the second wave of Saint-Domingue refugees

in 1804-05. Many of these unfortunates settled between Bourbon Street and Rampart Street, and also in Faubourgs Marigny and Tremé, and along the Bayou Road. An example of an early Creole cottage in Dauphine Street is found in an auction poster survey from 1838.²⁵



Fig. 5.39a. The Arsène Latour atelier, 625-627 Dauphine Street, dating from 1808 - 1813. This is a platibanda cottage with a cymantia cornice and an unusual asymmetrical façade. A sleeping loft has been added under the steeply pitched roof. The chimneys are lower than on cottages of the first decade. The color scheme is among the most popular on Creole cottages 1804 – 1825. The image has been modified in Photoshop to conform to the geometry of the surviving facade.

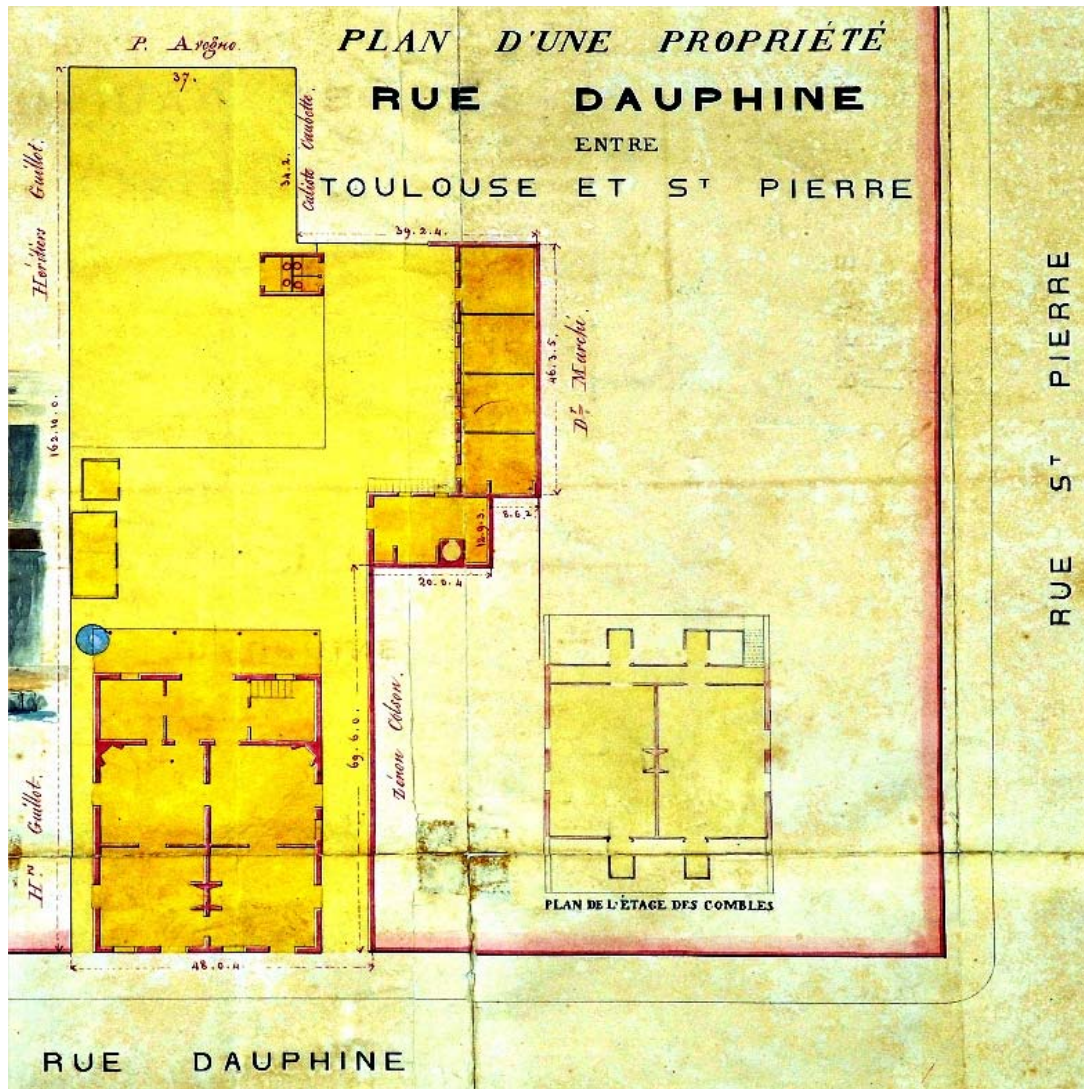


Fig. 5.39b. Plan of the cottage at 625-627 Dauphine Street, attached to T. Seghers, N.P., 11/23/1838. The plan shows the rigidly symmetrical four-square plan. The loft is reached by a winder stair in the rear right cabinet. The plan of the loft rooms is inserted at the right. The kitchen has a large bread oven attached, and there are eight smaller 11' x 13' rooms in a detached two-story dependency for servants or for room rental. The cottage, which survives, measures 37 Ft. 6.5 inches wide. The *appartement* rooms are about 17 feet wide by about 15 feet deep.

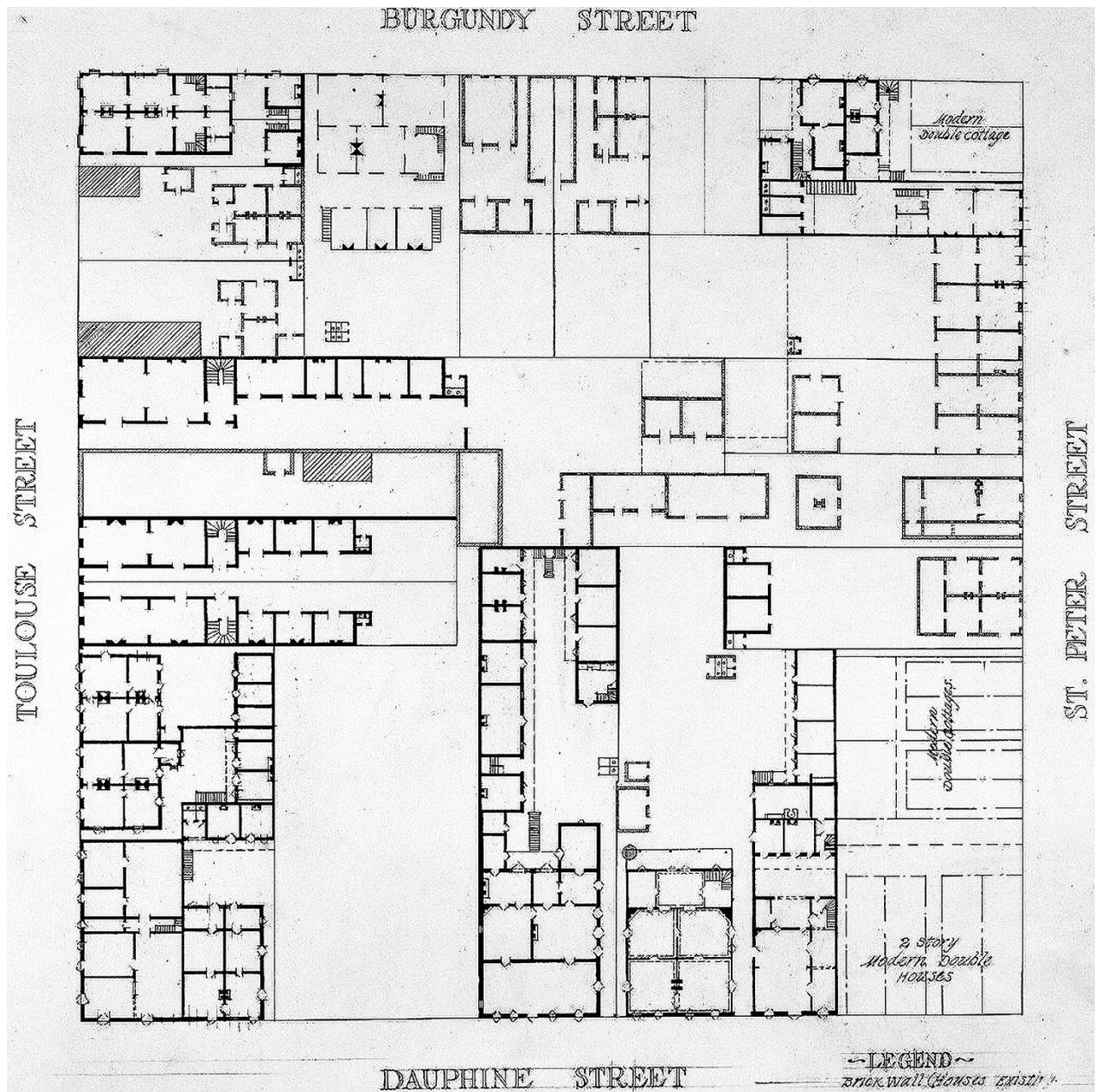


Fig. 5.40. A Historic American Building Survey of the plans of the historic buildings in Square 89, ca. 1940. The two Barthelemy Campenel cottages are the third and fourth houses above the lower left corner on Toulouse Street. They both have semi-double plans. The Arsène Latour *atalier*, is at 625-627 Dauphine Street, slightly right of the middle of the block. It is one of five houses in this square with the Creole Cottage floorplan described by Sam Wilson, Jr. The plan is courtesy the Louisiana History Center of the Louisiana State Museum.

Now we are in a position to gauge one of Barthelemy Lafon's most important contributions to the vernacular architecture of New Orleans. Lafon designed small houses as well as larger houses raised on tall basements. Probably, most of his vernacular style works remain undocumented, but a few examples have

survived. About 1795, Lafon sketched the plan for a four bay half Creole cottage with a front gallery and rear cabinet-loggia range of rooms. The house plan is rigidly symmetrical. It differs from the classic Creole cottage only in that it has one single range of *appartement* rooms, and it has a hip roof with a short ridge running front to back, rather than the gable roof of the typical urban Creole cottage. This house was built in 1806 on what is today the Chef Menteur Highway.

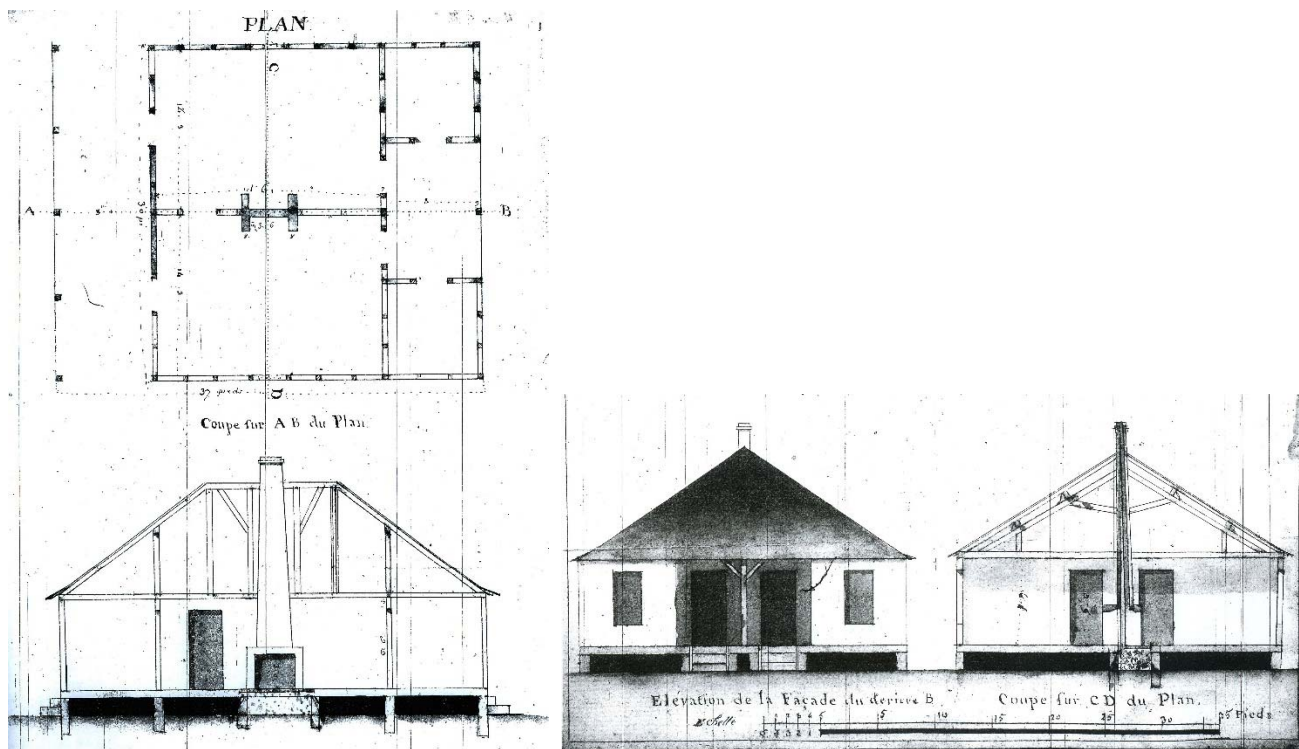


Fig. 5.41. Barthelemy Lafon's plans for his own house in Chef Menteur. The house was constructed in 1806. It lies fully within the Creole Cottage tradition. Images courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection.

At a spot where North Tonti Street crosses Esplanade and the Bayou Road in Tremé, there once stood a fine raised house belonging to Joseph Zeringue. Notary Narcisse Broutin sold this piece of property to Joseph Zeringue in 1805. He commissioned Barthelemy Lafon to design an appropriate country house, which was built in 1806. Zeringue lived in the house until 1814, when it was sold. It served as a school, the Collège d'Orléans, for some years, and was finally razed in 1856 to make way for the present house, called the Benachi-Torre House.²⁶ The address is 2257 Bayou Road. Lafon's design for the house has much in

common with the design for his own house (Fig. 5.41). The floorplan is essentially identical, with broad front gallery and a rear cabinet-loggia range of rooms with 12 foot square cabinets. Only two equal-sized main rooms existed, and perhaps that is one reason that the house did not serve its well-to-do owners longer. The principal difference was that the Zeringue house is raised a full story on heavy pillars. The location of the stairway is not indicated on Lafon's plan, but if other similar houses dating to the same period are any indication, it must have been set under the front gallery, usually to one side.

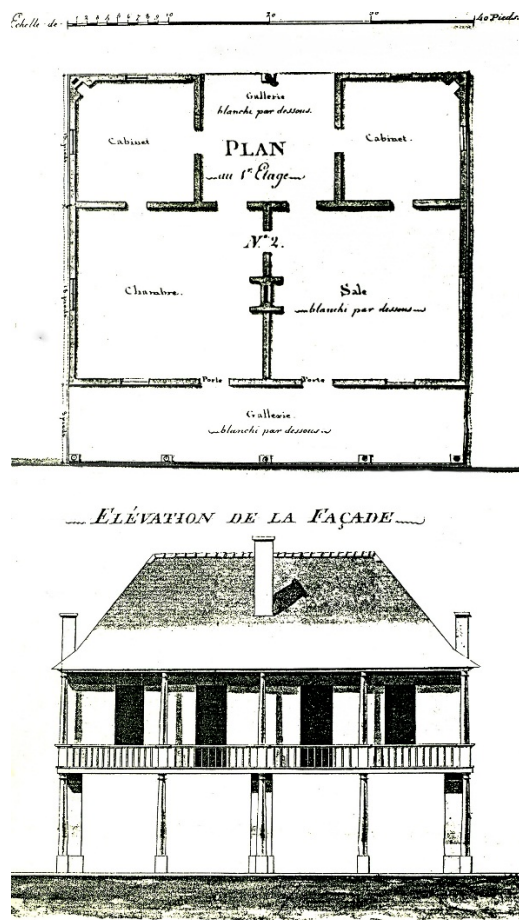


Fig. 5.42. Barthélemy Lafon's plans for the Joseph Zeringue house, built at 2257 Bayou Road in 1806. Image courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection.

Conclusion



Fig. 5.43. The Louis Cornue *porte-cochère* House, 630-634 Royal Street, designed and built by Lafon ca. 1795 in French Neoclassical style. Painting by Boyd Cruise, courtesy the Louisiana State Museum and the HABS. The exposed red brick is unusual for New Orleans, being popularized at the time by in-coming North American architects such as Benjamin H. Latrobe, with whom Lafon associated. This was for a time the home of James Pitot, the Mayor of New Orleans. The house was razed in the 1930s. Today, it is the location of the M. S. Rau Antique Store.

Not only was Barthelemy Lafon skilled in the design of the latest neoclassical styles (Fig. 5.43), he also seems to have participated fully in adapting West Indian Creole vernacular architecture to Louisiana. We cannot be surprised to learn that Lafon traveled to Hispaniola, and perhaps transported refugees between the horrors of the slave revolt and the cities of the American eastern seaboard on one of his several sailing vessels. Lafon's Zeringue house, particularly, could be set down in the colony of Saint-Domingue in the late middle eighteenth century without attracting any notice whatsoever (Fig. 5.42). Its tall hip roofline with the bellcast eaves speaks of eighteenth century France, while the wide front gallery, the elevation on an open *rez-de-chaussée* (under-story), and its cabinet-loggia range of rooms, all reflect the wealthy sugar colony of Saint-Domingue. This was French West Indian Creole architecture at its best. Of course, he was also commissioned to design commercial store-houses and Spanish style *azotera* (terrace-roofed) cottages (Figs. 5.10, 5.20). I, for one, would be very surprised if Lafon did not also design classic Creole cottages, but which have remained unrecorded. His versatility was notable.

From a perspective more than two centuries removed, it is almost as hard to summarize Lafon's contributions to architecture and to the cultural landscapes of Louisiana as it is to capture his inordinately chaotic career and life style. He was as full of seeming contradictions as anyone I have ever heard of – a restless soul who broke barriers, played rough in his business dealings, and made both brilliant and terrible decisions which affected his entire life. He was widely read, well-educated, and as close to the ideal of the Renaissance man as we might hope to find in the New World. He had many powerful friends, and he made enemies often. A clear and thorough documentary record is not the product of such a life style, and Lafon's accomplishments are imperfectly recorded. Perhaps the most fitting summary of his architectural and other achievements is to provide a preliminary overview of those which can be documented and those which are at least strongly suspected as flowing from his restless oeuvre.

SUPPLEMENT:

Interpreting Lafon's Surveys: The Architecture of the Quarter, 1803-1809.

Once one is acquainted with the survey and artistic conventions used by Barthelemy Lafon, it is possible to obtain an improved overview on the houses drawn in his surveys. Lafon consistently indicates the shape of the roof (hip or gable), but dormers and chimneys are not sketched in. It may be that in some cases Lafon used the French style hip roof as a standardized symbol for all roofs, even gabled and terrace roofs. We suspect that at least some of the houses surveyed in 1804 had lofts [*mansards*] which were lighted with dormers, but dormers are not shown in Lafon's property surveys. Neither is it possible in Lafon's graphics to determine whether a house stood on a raised on a *rez-de-chaussée*, or masonry "basement." The number of stories and other architectural information must be obtained from other sources, which in most cases, are available.

Floorplans.

Determining the precise floorplans of these houses presents another problem. Based on the plans of surviving houses, or those which were surveyed before they were razed, their layouts fall mostly into one of one of several common classes favored by the Creoles and their architects.²⁷

Lafon provides measures of the length and width of the lots and the footprint of the buildings upon them. With this information, estimates of the overall dimensions of the buildings may be obtained. The depth of each building places limits on the numbers of rooms and the ranges of rooms across the house from side to side. In general *appartements*, or full sized French/Spanish/Creole rooms, ran roughly 15 to 18 feet in depth – smaller in the houses of the poor. Gallery, loggia, *semi-double* and cabinet rooms were also near universal. They generally ran 8 to 12 feet deep. So, for example, if a house scales out at 24 feet from front to back, it is insufficiently deep to accommodate two full ranges of *appartements* or French Colonial full-sized rooms. It does not have a double-pile plan. If the house was designed in French Colonial style, its most probable plan would have been a full range of front rooms about 15 to 18 feet in depth, plus a *semi-*

double range of rooms behind those. If the house was designed in Caribbean Creole style, then it probably had a rear cabinet-loggia range of rooms 8 to 12 feet in depth, and no *semi-double* rooms. Only the largest of houses combined all of these features in a single plan.

To take an actual example of an interpretation of the ground plan of an 1804 house from Lafon's surveys, examine the Tricou house at 640 Saint Louis Street at the corner of Royal (Fig. 5.44. lower right corner). If the surveyor has drawn it to scale, it measures approximately 60 feet wide by 24 feet deep. It almost certainly has a floorplan containing one range of full-size *appartements*. These have been augmented, either by the addition of a full-length front gallery, or, more likely, a full length rear cabinet-loggia range of rooms, or a rear *semi-double* range of rooms. If the *appartement* rooms are 15 - 16 feet in depth, the cabinet-loggia range of rooms would be roughly 9 feet in depth. Since full front galleries were relatively uncommon on the houses of the rapidly urbanizing Quarter, the chances are greater that a cabinet-loggia or *semi-double* arrangement was used. The 60 foot width of the house would accommodate four 15 foot wide rooms, or, more likely, three full-sized near-square *appartement* rooms about 16 feet wide, plus one more narrow *chambre*-sized bedroom 12 feet in width. Unfortunately, by themselves and without additional information from other sources, there is no way to determine using Lafon's surveys alone, whether these early Vieux Carré domiciles contained purely French floorplans (*semi-doubles*), or whether they were creolized with cabinet-loggias and galleries. Fortunately, information from other sources is often available to fill in the picture.

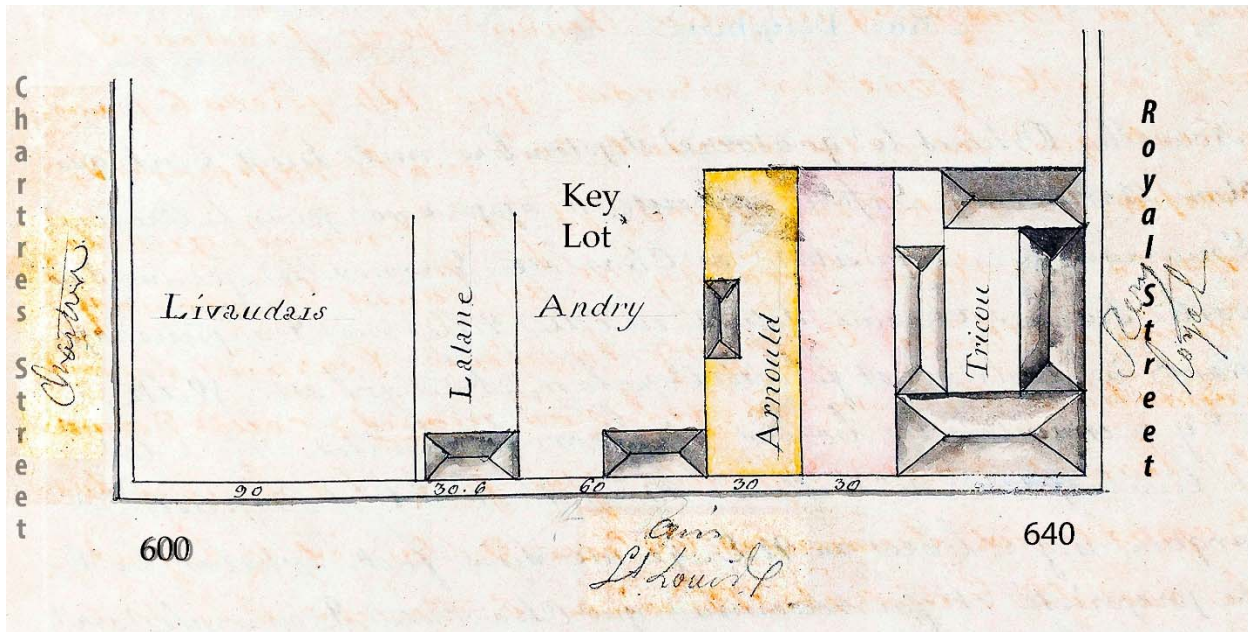


Fig. 5.44. Lafon Survey Book No. 3, p. 45, 1804. Squares No. 39 (right side of plan) and 40 (left side). The Tricou house is in the lower right-hand corner, at what today would be 640 Saint Louis Street. Street names and house number locations have been added to the original Lafon plan, as has an indication of the “key Lot.” The lot owned by Mr. Andry would, in the 1830s, be converted into Exchange Alley. In the Twentieth Century the entire square would be used for the home of the Louisiana Supreme Court building. These buildings stand directly across the street from what, today, is the Omni Royal Orleans Hotel.

Today, the 600 block St. Louis is the location of the downtown face of the Louisiana Supreme Court building, facing the Omni Royal Orleans Hotel across St. Louis Street. Canal Street is towards the top of the image (Fig. 5.44). Back in 1804. All of the colonial buildings are depicted with hip roofs, which probably implies that this was the most common roof type. Houses on the Lalane, and Andry properties might have functioned as either residences, or two-story store-houses. If the sketch is accurate, they are about sixteen feet in depth—too narrow to have floorplans with either cabinet-loggia or semi-double rooms in the rear.

In 1834, these buildings were demolished in a commercial redevelopment which inserted Exchange Place into the center of the square. This permitted a view of the St. Louis Hotel on Saint Louis Street to pedestrians standing on Canal Street. This narrow thoroughfare, the *alley de la bourse*, was lined with financial institutions and lawyer’s offices, designed by the French de Pouilly brothers in Neo-Grec style.²⁸ The design was based upon the Rue de Rivoli in Paris. Most of the office buildings were three to five stories

tall, and some had bridges across the narrow alley (Fig. 5.45). The construction of the alley divided the old square into two parts, now called Squares 39 (on Royal Street) and Square 40 (facing Chartres Street). After the demolition of those 1830s store-houses in 1903, the entire double square was devoted to a new ornate building in 1809. It would become eventually the Louisiana Supreme Court building. The 400 block of Exchange Alley was eliminated, but its 100 through 300 blocks still stand, running from Canal Street to Conti Street. Today, in the 400 block, the former location of Exchange Alley is represented by the set-back in the downtown façade of the Supreme Court building.



Fig. 5.45. The 400 block of *Alley de la Bourse*, or Exchange Place, looking towards the Saint Louis Hotel ca. 1840, courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection.

NOTES

¹ Hundreds of his property surveys are bound into three large survey books which he apparently assembled and numbered shortly before his death in 1820. *Books One* and *Two* begin in 1807, and are held by the Historic New Orleans Collection. The present Book, *Book Three*, beginning in early 1804, was moved in 1996 from New Orleans to the Library-Museum of the Grand Masonic Lodge in Alexandria, Louisiana. It been passed to the archive of the New Orleans Grand Lodge at some point in the Nineteenth Century from Lafon's original lodge, The Perfect Union No. 29 (after 1812, Perfect Union No. 1). The reason for its move to the Grand Lodge is unclear.

With the kind assistance of the officers of the Grand Lodge, the entire 302 page book was photographed, first in 2015 by Jay and Anne Edwards, and then in 2018 by professional photographer Eddy Perez, of the LSU Division of Strategic Communications. Through the wonders of Adobe Photoshop, the 214 year old surveys are now restored to something like their original glory (Edwards and Fandrich 2018). They reveal a considerable amount of new information on the appearance of New Orleans at the end of the Colonial Era and the beginning of the American Territorial Period. They also contain a lot of information on the land-owners of the city and their properties. Much of this is information not (yet) available through the on-line, searchable digital Diboll Vieux Carré Survey.

³ One is the Jean Baptiste Cottin house, said to have been designed and built by Gurlie and Guillot, though the house is listed as being present in 1804, and perhaps earlier (Pierre Pedesclaux, N.P. 6/1/1804. COB 47/725). The house is in the style of Guillemard. The second building is the rear extension of the Girod house at 500 Chartres Street. The first portion of the house was the building at 437 St. Louis Street, built in 1798 by Claude François Girod, the Mayor's brother. The façade may have been added later and is in the style of Guillemard, with vernacularized Ionic pilasters.

⁴ Edwards, Jay. 1993. Cultural Identifications in Architecture: The Case of the New Orleans Townhouse. *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*. 5(1):17-32.

⁵ Wilson 1968e, p. 12.

⁶ *Vieux Carré Courier*; 9/23/1964.

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⁸ Whittington, G. P., 1927. Dr. John Sibley of Natchitoches, 1757-1840. *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 10 (4): 478-487.

⁹ Garrigoux, Jean, 2017: 74. *A Visionary Adventurer, Arsene Lacarriere Latour, 1778-1837*. Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press.

¹⁰ Berquin-Duvallon. *Vue de la colonie espagnole du Mississippi, ou des provinces de Louisiana et Floride Occidentale*, 1803. Paris: 25-26.

¹¹ A note from the volume translated by John Davis. 1806. *Travels in Louisiana*, New York: L. Riley & Co., p. 23. This note apparently added by the translator. Accessed at: http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=R5EI4DRGMTUyOTc3MTc2NC44NzIwNTU6MToxNDoxMzAuMzkuMTg4LjEyOA&p_action=doc&p_queryname=1&p_docref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-10440450847D7D88@9959-108355C48D8B1638@1

¹² Din and Harkins 1996:259-274; Chandler 1977. Life in New Orleans in 1798. *Revue de Louisiane* 6(2): 181-82.

¹³ Edwards, Jay, 2015. Acts of the Cabildo, 1800/06/14. In Creole Cottage Vignette No. 8, Post-fires Zoning Ordinances in New Orleans 1795-1818. Edwards, *The New Orleans Creole Cottage: America's Atlantic-World House*. A Report to the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation. Pp. 272-274.

¹⁴ Lafon, Barthelemy Surveys, Volume 3. pp. 49, 54, 170, 178, 193.

¹⁵ Garrigoux, 2017: 5, 98, 107.

¹⁶ Wilson 1968a: 99-129; 1968e: 9-38.

¹⁷ When information is missing from the survey, it is sometimes possible to obtain a better description from the chain of title. Many "suits of succession" for the Quarter have been posted on line in the Tulane/Diboll Vieux Carré Digital Survey administered by the Historic New Orleans Collection. An enormous amount of work has been invested in this invaluable resource. Detailed descriptions from these and other contemporary documents remove any doubts about the nature of the house and the number of its floors, rooms, and service structures.

¹⁸ Edith Long. *Along the Banquette* 2004: 92.

¹⁹ The Lafon survey in Fig. 2.44 shows the distribution of cottage types on this street. There are eight *demi-terrains* with a single full 60 foot lot in the center of the block. The two end lots have Creole cottages with hip roofs facing the intersecting streets (Governor Nicholls (*l'Hôpital*) and Barracks (*du Quartier*). The Jacques Martinez Jr. house at the corner of Bourbon and *Quartier* measures exactly 30 feet on bourbon Street and 33 feet deep on the 70 foot deep lot on *Quartier*. The interior properties hold three gabled roof cottages, one hip roof cottage, one hip roof linear cottage, and one building which appears to be a terrace roof cottage. It was, at the time, the house of Manuel Prados. It is described as "a small house measuring 30 feet, wood and brick with four rooms and a double chimney..."

²⁰ Garrigoux 2017: 113.

²¹ Pierre Pedesclaux, N.P., NONA 8/23/1811, COB 63/359.

²² Lafon Survey Book No 1, p. 41. HNOC.

²³ Wilson 1968a: 109.

²⁴ Edwards, Jay. 2008. Unheralded Contributions across the Atlantic World. *Material Culture* 5(2): 161-202.

²⁵ Attached to Theodore Seghers, N.P. Nov. 23, 1838. Vol. 27, Fol. 875.

²⁶ Friends of the Cabildo, 1980. *New Orleans Architecture Vol. VI, Faubourg Tremé and the Bayou Road*, pp. 33, 146.

²⁷ Every culture defines its own favored system of geometric layout, including the terminology for the different kinds of rooms which are commonly recognized. Most variations are simply elaborations of different kinds on one or another of the fundamental plans of that time and culture. For a discussion of the kinds of floorplans of French Colonial and French Creole houses, 1700 – 1900, refer to Edwards, Jay, 2015. Creole Cottage Vignette No. 2, Cottage Plan Types and Components in Evolutionary Perspective, in *The New Orleans Creole Cottage*. A Report to the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation, pp. 211-219.

²⁸ Wilson, Samuel Jr. 1968e. History and Architecture of the Vieux Carré. In, *Plan and Program for the Preservation of the Vieux Carré*, p. 16.

CHAPTER 5, Supplement:

SUMMARY OF BARTHELEMY LAFON'S ARCHITECTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS

(His Commissions and Property Purchases, 1787 – 1820). Jay Edwards

Biographical Info.:

Activity: Architectural Comissions, Purchases, Sales, Publications:

<p>Lafon, Barthelemy (le Pintoir – from Pinte, France).</p> <p>Born, 1769, Villepinte, Languedoc-Roussillon, France.</p> <p>Active in New Orleans: 1789-1818.</p> <p>Died of yellow fever, in New Orleans, 1820.</p> <p>-----</p> <p><u>Lafon's Occupations:</u> architect-designer, building contractor, geographical engineer, civil and military engineer, cartographer, city surveyor, surveyor for the Louisiana Territory, developer, land speculator, scholar and teacher, privateer (pirate), smuggler, dealer in slaves, spy for foreign governments (probably a double agent), planter.</p> <p><i>“Ingénieur-Géographe, Député de l’Arpenteur-Général pour le Comté d’Orléans” (1807).</i></p> <p>Charter member, Masonic <i>Loge Parfaite Union No. 29</i>, York Rite—organized, 1793, chartered as <i>Parfaite Union No. 1</i> in 1812. Corner Camp and Gravier Streets. Refer to <i>Tableaus</i>. Andrew Jackson was a Masonic guest, Gov. C.C. Claiborne was a member, as was Edward Livingston, with whom Lafon worked closely.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Joseph Reynes House, 601-07 Chartres Street, corner Toulouse, Built 1793, in Lafon style with heavy banding around openings, “in the style of the country.” Reynes Papers in property record at LSU Special Collections. Carlos Trudeau, surveyor. 2. Tremoulet-Pavie House. 439-41 Royal Street. 1795. A 2 story entresol storehouse, terrace roof. NONA 055.029. 3. Pedesclaux-Le Monnier Storehouse “First skyscraper,” 636-42 Royal Street, c. 1795. French neoclassical much in the style of Chateau de Benouville, 1769, (Charles-Nicolas Ledoux-architect). Lafon’s office located here 1805-07. Lafon designed a 3 story terrace-roofed building to which a fourth floor was added in 1811 by Latour and Laclotte. The flat-band moldings around the openings on the second and third floors (<i>entresol</i> and <i>premier étage</i> in French) probably reflect the Spanish neoclassical style of Guillemard, according to Sam Wilson (“Architecture of the Vieux Carré,” 1968:106). See also the Diboll Vieux Carré survey (on line). 4. Lafon-Roque House, 626-628 Royal Street. 7/4/1795 (P. Pedesclaux, 25/537). Louis Cornue subdivides and sells to Lafon and Pedro Roque, partners, a half lot, Lafon builds a 2-story townhouse, a mirror-image plan to the Cornue house at 630-634. See the 1876 Sanborn Map, Vol. II, sheet 31. Lafon and Roque sell to Dr. Luis Fortin, 5/14/1800. Building seriously remodeled in 1860. 5. Louis Cornue house, 630-634 Royal Street, ca. 1795. French Neoclassical storehouse with terrace roof and <i>port cochère</i>. 3-bay fenestration, windows capped with pediments – See Boyd Cruise painting (Favrot Estate). Central wrought-iron balcony. 2 stories on <i>rez de chaussée</i>. Built for Cornue, who sells to Moret and Marchand 1796. Purchased by James Pitot, Mayor of New Orleans, 2/19/1800. Pitot resides there until 1813. House razed. 1930s – Today, location of M.S. Rau Antique Store. 6. Jean Baptiste Rivière house, 301-07 Decatur Street, corner Bienville. 1798-1799. A raised pedimented entresol house with dormers, <i>Colombage</i> with tile roof and front balustrade, 35 Ft. wide on the Levee. 7. Fish Market, built by Lafon, 1798-1800. The tile roofed fish market on the levee was designed by Gilberto Guillemard (see, sketch in New
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<p>Leaves Saint-Domingue in 1802. In 1803, trades in Saint-Domingue, Havana, Vera Cruz, Charleston, in his large copper-bottomed privateer, <i>Bellona</i>. He is listed as the owner of the corsair <i>La Misère</i>, with which he captured two Spanish vessels in 1814. In October of 1814 his ships <i>Misère</i> and <i>La Flora Americana</i> were captured in the American military raid on Barataria. In 1816, his armed privateer <i>La Carmelita</i> was captured by forces of the government of Galveston.</p> <p>His numerous building contracts are mostly undocumented. Some commissions listed here are “probables,” based upon their dates, locations, and their stylistic similarities with known commissions.</p> <p>Surveyor Joseph Pilié apprenticed to Lafon 1805-07. They complete the 1st comprehensive map of Lower Louisiana for Gov. Claiborne, 1806. The map is delivered to President Thomas Jefferson by Daniel Clark, Jr. and others.</p> <p>1806, Jan, 21, Lafon commissioned as 1st Lieut. 2nd Regiment, Louisiana Militia. Later promoted to Captain. Works on New Orleans fortifications with Arsene Lacarrière Latour. 1st Engineer under Wilkinson, 1812. Watercolor sketches, HNOC and, Library of Congress.</p> <p>1813, Militia commander General Flournoy commissions Lafon to draft maps of all possible fortifiable places in Louisiana in anticipation of a British invasion. Lafon produces his <i>Atlas of the 7th Military District</i>.</p> <p>1807. Publishes <i>Calendrier de Commerce de la Nouvelle Orleans</i>.</p>	<p>Orleans Public Library, Cabildo Papers, 12/3/1798). Later, it was connected to meat market (No. 17, below). It was demolished in 1809.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. In 1808 a New Fish Market was designed for the city by Lafon and Arsène Latour. It was built, but soon flattened in the hurricane of 1812. (Edith Elliot Long, <i>Along the Banquette</i>.2004:63). 9. Samuel Moore House/Stranger’s Hotel, 513-35 Chartres. c. 1798- 1802. This was a 4-story hotel, capped with a surrounding balustrade. Destroyed after 1838 (Wilson 1968:106-108). “The carved work of the chimney pieces and arching of the windows and sides is very rich and handsome. The cornishing rich and bold and handsomely painted. The house is, I believe, the highest in the town.” Dr. John Sibley, 1802). 10. Joseph Vincent Rillieux-Waldhorn House -- Bank of the United States. 335-41 Royal Street, corner Conti, ca. 1795-1800. In French+Spanish Neoclassical colonial style, façade similar to Bosque House on Chartres Street. Originally built with a tiled terrace roof. Now Waldhorn’s Antiques. 11. Joseph Montegut Hs. 739-33 Royal Street. 1795-1800. A 5-bay, central <i>port-cochère</i> Spanish colonial style townhouse. The house had rusticated pilasters at the corners and heavy flat bands surrounding the segmental-arched openings on the first floor. See sketch by Gilberto Guillemard, 1790 (HNOC MSS 471, F.1921). This was the style Guillemard used in Pontabla’s house at the corner of St. Peter and Chartres Streets (Petite Theatre). These elements popular in Spanish colonial neoclassical architecture appear to have exerted a major influence on the designs of Lafon in the 1790 decade. 12. Repairs to City Jail (site of the Cabildo), 701 Chartres facing Jackson Square, 1794-95. 13. Contract with the City to build and repair street gutters, 1797-1799. 14. Joachin de la Torre Hs. 707-09 Dumaine, c.1799. A single-story terrace-roofed Colonial cottage. 15. 711-15 Dumaine. Lafon sells house to Joaquin de Latorre, 5/12/1800. 16. 717-19 Dumaine. Terrace-roofed single-story colonial cottage, c. 1799. 17. Lafon acquires the former St. Maxent <i>Vacherie</i> on prairies south of Chef Menteur and Bayou Sauvage, New Orleans East near the Michaud slip (Intercoastal Waterway), Jan. 7, 1801 (Maygarden 1997: 23). This becomes a portion of his <i>L’Heureuse Folie</i> plantation. 18. Jean Louis Isnard house, 409 Bourbon, c.1801-06. Became Louisiana Masonic Lodge No. 1, 1809-1813.
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<p><u>Bureau des Arpentages, 1807</u>: Under Isaac Briggs, Arpenteur-Général du Territoire.</p> <p>Barthelemy Lafon, Ingénieur-Géographe, Député de l'Arpenteur-Général pour le Comté d'Orléans.</p> <p>1814: Indicted for taking two Spanish vessels. Released three months later by Andrew Jackson to work on the fortifications of New Orleans.</p> <p>1815: Lafon plays a significant role in the battle at Chalmette; indictments quashed by order of President Munroe.</p> <p>1815 - 1817. Lafon working as secret agent 045 in the Spanish espionage ring of Padre Antoine Sedilla. Latour and the Laffite brothers were also employed.</p> <p>February, 1815. New Orleans District Attorney, John Dick, re-indicts Dominique Youx, Barthelemy Lafon and others for Piracy.</p> <p>"The number of houses which he has built in this city and the elegance and solidity of which are proved at the first sight, cannot fail to secure him a preference over every other architect in the city" <i>Louisiana Courier</i>, 10/16/1816. Lafon's newspaper ad fails to attract a clientele.</p> <p>"The clearly ordered treatment of the bays and openings appears to be characteristic of Lafon's facades." He employs Spanish Neoclassical window and door surrounds, in imitation of Gilberto Guillemard's popular architectural style.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. City Meat Market, tile roof, Plans submitted to city 1808. The market was built using these plans, but was destroyed in 1813 by a hurricane. 20. Jean François Merieult Hs. 527-33 Royal Street, in Lafon plan of 1792 Builder, Jacob Copperwaite, 1792. Present site of Historic New Orleans Collection. 21. 1810, 301-09 Dauphine Street, B. Lafon and Pedro Roque, 1795. Property survey by Lafon, 3/22/1810 attached to P. Pedesclaux, COB 60/145. 3/28/1810. 22. Bartholeme Bosque House, 617-21 Chartres, Lafon Architect and rebuilder for Pontalba/Bosque, 1795 (Edith Long 9/24/1964). 23. Mlle. Jeanne Macarty townhouse, 401 Decatur Street at Conti, 1794. Lafon "le Pintoir, Architect/builder (Edith Long V.C. <i>Courier</i> 9/24/1964; 1/22/1965). Salon and 3 <i>chambres</i>, 20' x 52', <i>rez-de-chaussée</i>, 8' gallery on front, rear loggia. A kitchen + dining + pantry building, and a warehouse. Original sketch-plans for this house survive in the Louisiana State Museum Spanish Colonial Records No. 3361. And 1.2.028.010. \$12,250. 24. The Etienne Debon 2-story Spanish townhouse, 509-511 Decatur Street. Designed and constructed by Lafon 1798. Illustration by Charles de Armas, HABS 006.111. One narrow passageway and two commercial doors. Stacked rusticated pilasters on the corners, segmental arched windows, wrought iron balcony protected by double-pitch roof extension. Spanish tile roof, flat band architraves on all openings. 25. Barthelemy Lafon speculation Storehouse, 513-515 Decatur. c. 1795. Purchased 4/25/1795, sold to Jean Roques, 6/23/1797. A 2½ story townhouse illustrated in 1852 NONA plan book drawing in "Spanish colonial Style," with Ionic pilasters. See: François Broutin N.P. June 23, 1797.COB 007/226. A portion of this building, somewhat changed in the Greek Revival Period, may be seen on the right side of NONA 006.111. A smaller portion of the building in its earlier form is visible on the extreme left side of NONA 044.023. 26. The Miguel Fortier House, 517 Decatur Street. Built 1795. An entresol store house "most likely designed by Lafon," and built by the master mason, Joseph Duguet. Charles de Armas painting, NONA 044:023. Note a small portion of the Lafon storehouse at 513-515 Decatur on the extreme left side of this image. 27. Brion/Lafon House, 60 (934-940) rue St. Louis corner Burgundy.1804-10. A small cottage at the corner lot purchased lot from estate of Julie Brion, c. 1804. New house, 4 rooms, 2 cabinets, 2 cellars and a gallery. In 1810, Lafon subdivides 60 Ft. wide lot and builds a raised cottage which functioned as a duplex. He sells one half and then sells 30 Ft. corner lot to
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<p>Compare Pedesclaux, Bosque and Rillieux houses (Harriet Bos, M.A. Thesis, Tulane University, 1977: 58).</p> <p>1817. Lafon in Galveston, appointed head of the local government when Jean Laffite returns to New Orleans. Later, Lafon returns to New Orleans as well.</p>	<p>his mistress Modeste Fouchère, f.c.l. She lost it but Lafon rented it back. He died here of Yellow Fever in 1820.</p> <p>28. Charles Leveau Cottage, 430 Burgundy. C. 1804. Above lot divided: renumbered, holding the former kitchen building for 940 St. Louis. Sold to Joseph Le Carpentier, 12/31/1810.</p> <p>29. Development of corner lot at 901-15 Burgundy, 301-09 Dauphine, 1795. B. Lafon and Pedro Roque,</p> <p>30. 1802 plans for levee repairs submitted to City Council.</p> <p>31. Lafon lays out the first segment of the Lower Garden District for Armand Duplantier, 1807. Eventually he acquires twelve or more lots in Faubourg La Course.</p> <p>32. B. Lafon Plantation Creole cottage, Chef Menteur road and Bayou Sauvage, 1804. Plans in Lafon Notebook, HNOC. His <i>L'Heureuse Folie</i> plantation located in Chef Menteur east in Lafon's 1806 map of southern Louisiana, and Latour's 1815 map of the Battle of New Orleans. The plantation complex (house, three cabins and a brickyard) was located on Bayou Sauvage near the Michaud slip on the Intercoastal Waterway. His claim confirmed by U.S. Land Commissioners in 1805. Lafon mortgages the plantation in 1809, and sells it in 1811 for \$15,000.00 (Maygarden 1997: 26).</p> <p>33. Joseph Zeringue, raised cottage. Bayou Road, 1806. Raised cottage w. 8 Ft. gallery and cabinets-loggia. Lafon Notebook, HNOC. Lafon with Narcisse Broutin. Finished, June, 1807. 2,500 Piastres. Plans in Lafon Notebook, HNOC. Don Joseph Zeringue owned a sizable lot on the Left Bank and parallel to Bayou St. John. It opened onto Bayou St. John just above the point where the Esplanade Avenue bridge now crosses near the entrance NOMA in City Park, and where at that time Metairie Bayou and <i>El Camino de la Metairie</i> intersected Bayou St. John. See the Spanish colonial map by Carlos Trudeau, <i>Borrador del Plano...Nueva Orleans</i>, 1802.</p> <p>34. Vincent Nolte House. 2 story storehouse. 1819. B. Latrobe, architect (survey plan of Lafon 9/27/1809, attached to M. de Armas, 12/18/1810. 4:458).</p> <p>35. Storehouse. 513-15 Decatur Street. c. 1795. Purchased by Lafon.</p> <p>36. Jean Goodwin, brick storehouse, 508-10 Chartres Street. 1808. Lafon builder. A brick house 20 Ft. wide, 18 Ft. above grade, covered with round tiles or slate. Next to Nicholas Girod. Lafon to use until 2/1/1809, and Negro Charles. \$600.00.</p>
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	<p>37. Jean Baptiste Bermudez Creole Cot. 1200 Bourbon Street. c. 1799. Lafon exchanges a lot at 1200 Bourbon Street to Jean Baptiste Bermudez for a second lot, 5/19/1801. E. Bouny, N.P., COB 138/9.</p> <p>38. Plans for public bath house between St. Louis and Toulouse and the levee, 1796 + plans for theater and lighthouse, never realized (Bos 1977:36–43).</p> <p>39. 719-723 Dumaine Street. Lafon owner 1799 to 1800, when it is sold to Lorenzo Segur. Buildings not mentioned until 1810 in Notarial Acts.</p> <p>40. Lafon's Garage Sale: 2/6/1816. <i>L'Ami des Lois</i>: 1). His concession between city and suburb (Bayou Road?), 8½ acres. 2) 35,000 superficial arpents in Chef Menteur. 3) A tract of land at mouth of Bayou Lafourche, right bank, part of Donaldsonville. 4) 3 tracts of land in Bellevue, Opelousas, each 400 superficial arpents. 5) A library of 445 books, including encyclopedias 137 volumes, geography 84 vols., Math, natural philosophy, 94 vols., Travels in America, 75 vols. 6) Furniture. 7 A French Curricule (convertible carriage). Contact Lafon, 940 St. Louis Street.</p> <p>41. 523 Decatur Street. Lafon buys a lot, April 25, 1795 from Pontalba?</p> <p>42. 3/31/1814. <i>Atlas of the [7th] Military District... Tennessee, Louisiana and Mississippi Territory</i>. Barthelemy Lafon, Topographical Engineer. This atlas includes watercolor plans for forts and military installations in Louisiana between Natchitoches and the Balise Post. HNOC Succession Nos. 1970.2.1 through 1970.2.23.</p>

CHAPTER 6.

LAFON THE PATRIOT:

His Military Service during the War of 1812 Culminating in the Battle of New Orleans

Ina Fandrich

In its scope it was every bit a world war, involving the fledgling United States and her interest in most of North America and the great European powers of France, Great Britain, and Spain.¹

Ronald J. Drez

This chapter seeks to establish that Barthelemy Lafon was a true American Patriot and a major unsung hero of the Battle of New Orleans, which brought the War of 1812 to an end. But, before we will enlist his contributions to Andrew Jackson's miraculous victory on the Chalmette Battle Field in St. Bernard Parish on January 8, 1815, let us return to the Louisiana Purchase, when the American enterprise in the Lower Mississippi Valley began.

Setting the Stage for the Americans

On December 20th, 1803, a large crowd of people from all walks of life had gathered in the Plaza des Armas (today Jackson Square) to witness the political power transfer from French to American rule. A 34-year old Barthelemy Lafon was among them. The people surrounding him, who had made the City of New Orleans and its nearby Parishes their home, had every hue in the rainbow of human complexions. They spoke multiple languages among each other, French, Spanish, English, German, Catalan, Basque, Choctaw, Chitimacha, Attakapa, Bambara, Wolof, Ki-Kongo, just to name the most commonly spoken ones. Dressed in a vast range of colorful outfits in the style of their respective cultural homelands they must have been some sight to see. The dynamic engineer, architect, and land surveyor, who was fluent in French, Spanish, and English and could read at least 10 more languages, may have been upstairs in the

¹ Ronald J. Drez, *The War of 1812 Conflict and Deception: The British Attempt to Seize New Orleans and Nullify the Louisiana Purchase*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014, p. 1

Sala Capitular, located on the second floor of the Cabildo, among the official government delegates, where the French Prefect Citizen Pierre Clément de Laussat together with his American counterparts, special attachés Robert Livingston and James Monroe, were solemnly signing the Louisiana Purchase into effect. Or maybe Lafon was joining the motley crowd downstairs in the Plaza, waiting for Laussat, who represented France's ambitious 1st Consul, Napoleon Bonaparte, to come out on the second-floor balcony together with his co-signers, Livingston and Monroe, who were acting on behalf of America's third President, the great Thomas Jefferson. Standing right next to them was also Louisiana's newly appointed American territorial governor, William C. C. Claiborne, who was described as very handsome, but too young (he was only 28), indecisive, and much too inexperienced. In addition to that, he didn't speak any French, not a word. Even worse, he had no military experience whatsoever and despised violence of any sort.² His lacking proficiency in every regard made the majority of New Orleans local elite wonder whether he was qualified for the job, and justifiably so. Suffice it to say that he was not Jefferson's first choice for this position. But, after the flamboyant Marquis de Lafayette had declined the offer, Claiborne was the obvious next-best choice. Prior to coming to New Orleans, he was already deployed in nearby Natchez, then the Capital of the newly chartered American Mississippi Territory, where he had served as the Territorial Governor since May of 1801. Hence, he could easily be transferred to Louisiana. Furthermore, Jefferson was personally indebted to him, because Claiborne was one of his most loyal supporters in Congress who had helped decisively to tip the scales in his favor so that he could beat his chief rival Aaron Burr in the 1800 election campaign and secure the presidency.³ Jefferson returned the favor, after taking the oath of office as the third President of the United States of America in 1801. He rewarded Claiborne first with the post in Mississippi and now with the even more prestigious position of governor of what was about to become the New American Territory of Orleans. To make the transfer official a military representation from both sides was required. To that effect, General James Wilkinson,

² On the personality of William C. C. Claiborne see for instance "The Great Compromiser" in Eberhard L. Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams: New Orleans and the Transformation of Early America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 139-145; and "An Anatomy of a Rivalry" in *ibid.*, pp. 153-154

³ Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, p. 143

had arrived with a unit of American soldiers to support Claiborne and the French General Claude Perrin Victor had to cross the Atlantic with a delegation of his men, to join Laussat.⁴

From up there on the second-floor gallery of the Cabildo, the six gentlemen would oversee together the official transfer ceremony in the *Plaza des Armas*, carefully observing the French officers as they were taking down their beloved revolutionary flag, the *tricolore*. In its stead American soldiers would proudly raise their flag, with fifteen stars and fifteen stripes at the time, as a jubilant crowd was cheering them on. To be exact, not everyone was cheerful that day.

Reportedly, Laussat was crying bitterly, when he saw the American stars and stripes going up.⁵ Nine months earlier, when he had arrived in Louisiana in March of the same year, a similarly jubilant crowd had been greeting him. At that time, he had cherished high hopes to reign as Louisiana's French Governor for decades to come. It was devastating for him, to see his hopes for a bright ambitious future on the North-American continent suddenly vanishing in thin air for good. In fact, his journey across the Atlantic was ill-fated from the onset. Shortly after Laussat's departure from France, Napoleon had suddenly changed his mind. Instead of preparing for the retrocession of the vast Spanish Louisiana Territory back to France, he decided to declare war on Great Britain again. In order to fund such an expensive undertaking, he needed money desperately and jumped on the opportunity of selling Louisiana to the Americans. Although he gave it away for the bargain price of just \$15 million, it was a considerable financial contribution to pay for a new army that he was now hastily mustering in. Livingston and Monroe were negotiating the purchase treaty in Paris on behalf of Jefferson. The Louisiana Purchase treaty of ... on... was an incredible achievement for the young American Republic. At about 3 cents per acre, the United States received almost the entire fertile great plains from the Rocky Mountains to the hills of Appalachia that promised to become excellent agricultural lands. The Louisiana Purchase doubled

⁴ For a thorough discussion of the transfer of powers from Spanish to French and French to American rule for the ratification of the Louisiana Purchase and an engaging, well-written account of the turbulent personal drama in the lives of the participating officials see Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, chap. 3 "The Passion of Citizen Laussat."

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

the size of the country. For Napoleon, this arrangement was also advantageous. He had decided to re-enslave the Haitian people in order to once again gain enormous profits from the sugar industry. The bread basket to feed the enslaved workers in Haiti was supposed to become Louisiana in his scheme. Now that he had lost Haiti, there was no use of Louisiana for him anymore and he sought to dispose of it as quickly as possible. Furthermore, in this manner, Louisiana would not fall into the hands of Great Britain and he could stick it to his ultimate arch-enemy. Bonaparte was scrambling to strengthen his military power for the impending conflict with the British and needed every soldier he had in his command at home in France. Hence, General Victor and his delegation of troops that was supposed to accompany Laussat and arrive in New Orleans with him in the Spring of 1803, were ordered to stay and didn't leave France. Meanwhile, Laussat was desperately waiting for them in Louisiana. Day after day, he grew more frustrated as his position in New Orleans became increasingly precarious. A powerless Laussat without any representation of Napoleon's mighty army soon became the laughing stock of the local elite. Then, after months and months of waiting, General Victor finally did arrive at the shores of the Mississippi, but only to convey to Laussat the shocking news from Paris that Louisiana had been sold to the Americans. The transfer of powers needed a minimal presence of French military and that was the only reason for his visit. Laussat and the General were to preside together first over the official transfer from Spanish Rule back to French control, which took place on November 30th 1803, only to hand it officially over to the Americans at their earliest convenience. That ended up being this fateful, bright and beautiful day, December 20th 1803. As it turned out, Citizen Laussat ruled Louisiana just for a lousy 20 days altogether. His dreams had been crushed. His heart was broken.

Lafon to the contrary, although French-born, Francophone, and Francophile, must have been very happy on that day. Maybe he was dancing joyfully in the jubilating crowd. He had reasons to look forward to a bright and prosperous future for himself, personally. Lafon must have been thrilled to have landed an important job within the brand-new American regime, eagerly awaiting to start working as the newly commissioned surveyor of the soon to be chartered Territory of Orleans, which would become the future State of Louisiana nine years later. His personal good fortune aside, Lafon was a visionary with a

life-long desire to make his social environment a better place. To this end, he may have been cautiously optimistic at best when considering the fate of the city he had made his home for a decade and a half. Evidently, the Americans would bring major political, social, and cultural changes with them and he knew all too well from the recent developments in his native France (ravaged by an excessively violent Revolutionary War) that radical change is not always for the better.

Like most members of the local educated elite, his outlook was global. The wealth and wellbeing of the city depended on access to international commerce. New Orleanians have always liked to trade with people from just about anywhere. After all, the city was founded by French Canadian fur traders who had arrived in the Mississippi Delta at the end of the Seventeenth Century. They had established their French colonial capital in 1718 within an already existing Native American city that had the name *Balbancha* for hundreds or maybe thousands of years before their arrival. The local First Nations had figured out first, that what we now call the French Quarter is located on a bluff 10 feet above the sea-level and doesn't flood. They had their villages on high ground along the River and around the big estuary that the French named Lake Pontchartrain. Balbancha was located at the shortest distance between the two major waterways with Bayou St. John connecting both. Bayouk Tchoupic as they called it then was not reaching all the way to the River, they had to use a brief "portage" pathway of less than a quarter of a mile length to carry their boats from the Mississippi to the Bayou, where they could continue their way on water to the Lake. Balbancha means "the place where many foreign languages are spoken" indicating it was a major trading junction all along where people met to exchange goods from both waterways. The French built their colonial headquarter in this location starting in 1718. They renamed it "La Nouvelle Orleans" for their regent, Philippe II, the Duke of Orleans. They were by majority former Canadian fur traders, whose very existence was based on vast international trade connections across North America with various First Nations and buyers of their precious furry cargo on the markets throughout Europe and the world-wide European colonies. Within the first century of Louisiana's existence, a very blended, multicultural, and polyglot population stemming from three continents, Native Americans, Europeans, and West Africans, had come together as one community to trade with each other and to survive together

frequent floods, catastrophic fires, and repeated horrific outbreaks of tropical diseases (such as small pox, malaria, tuberculosis, and yellow fever) that threatened to wipe them out. New Orleans was a very deadly place. The survivors were hearty people who had two things in common: they were all Catholics worshipping together on Sundays in the same Cathedral, white and black and red and every shade in between, kneeling next to each other before God, and, they were all capable of communicating in French with each other. Besides whatever other languages and dialects they spoke at home and with their friends, their lingua franca was French. Even the nine Spanish governors during the four decades of Iberian rule, all of them, spoke fluently French. Spanish was used mainly as a written language for official record-keeping by the colonial government, the notaries, the priests who were in charge of the sacramental records (functioning as birth, marriage, and death certificates), and land surveys. The locals spoke many languages and engaged into global international commerce, however, when it came to their primary loyalties, they were committed to their own community and immediate families first, no matter which far-away Empire was about to claim Louisiana as their own. Most New Orleanians were pragmatic and preoccupied with the struggles of day by day survival. The modern cliché of “Think globally, but act locally!” seems to have been their prerogative already more than two hundred years ago. The peculiar location of their city near the mouth of the Mississippi, where transatlantic international trade could meet the local trade into the vast interior lands, had left them no choice. By the turn from the 18th to the 19th century, the city’s leading men, Lafon included, were painfully aware of the fact that their city’s strategic location had made her the coveted crown jewel for any of the major powers of their day. The French, the British, the Spanish, and now the Americans, they all had set their eyes on the “Isle of Orleans.” Control of the city promised not only to access the considerable wealth there, but more importantly, it could ultimately lead to gaining control over the entire North American continent. There were no airplanes, no highways and no railroads then, waterways were all they had to transport their wares and all of the major rivers of North America including all of their tributaries ended up in the Mississippi. New Orleans, located strategically near the mouth of the big river, was the inevitable gateway into the vast North American interior, and simultaneously a major commercial outlet into the Gulf of Mexico and thus the

Atlantic world, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa. Whether for commercial reasons or strategic military considerations, New Orleans was the key to gaining control over the sugar and cotton fields in the South and the grain fields in the Great Plains of the American Mid-West.

Besides Laussat, the French Prefect, there were probably few people shedding a tear that day. Like many other members of the local elite, Lafon may have been wary of the violent excesses of Jacobinism. Men like the first two mayors of the soon to be incorporated city, were not sad to see the French prefect leave: the sugar baron Étienne de Boré (Mayor of New Orleans 1804) and the wealthy merchant James (alias Jacques-François) Pitot from Normandy in France (Mayor of New Orleans 1804/1805), whom Lafon knew well and who could have stood next to him in the Plaza des Armas.

De Boré was born in Kaskaskia, in the Illinois Territory of French Colonial Louisiana, but his family moved back to Paris when he was only 4 years old. He grew up in upper-class circles connected to the royal household, and had served for many years as a Musketeer for the King of France, before deciding in later years to return to the New World. He settled in New Orleans where his wife, Marie Marguerite D'Estréhan, was from and started a sugar cane business on his plantation, located where today's Audubon Park and Audubon Zoo can be enjoyed. In 1795, he was the first Louisiana planter, who succeeded in granulating sugar. His success story sparked the sugar boom along the Mississippi that would begin in the late 1790s and come into full bloom in the 19th century. Soon sugar cane plantations would line the river from the Gulf of Mexico to the cotton fields of Northern Louisiana.

Pitot's professional business career was also based on the sugar industry, but he was a merchant managing and investing in auxiliary industries, not engaged in cultivating sugar cane itself like the planters were. He had left his native Villedieu-les-Poêles in Normandy, France, as a young man to represent merchant enterprises in the former St. Domingue, where legendary riches were extracted from the relentless exploitation of enslaved African sugar cane workers, but was forced to leave when the sugar and coffee fields on the Island as well as their colonial capital Cap Français, where he lived, went up in

flames.⁶ The spirit of the French Revolution had spilled over into the colony by 1791. General Toussaint L'Ouverture rose to power and put an end to the cruel abuse of African laborers. He was a superb military leader who grew up enslaved, but was already an educated free man of color by the time the war in St. Domingue Revolutionary War began. He led the oppressed African population to freedom, kept the British out of the Island and conquered Spanish Santo Domingo on the Eastern side of the of Island—all that, fighting on the side of Napoleon's Revolutionary army. To thank him for these enormous achievements, Napoleon turned on him. He decided to re-enslave the African population, to once again extract endless profits of them that would pay for his excessive spending habits and seemingly never-ending wars. [Insert quote: "I will ...the "guilded negro.."] Bonaparte was able to deceive L'Ouverture, captured him, and left him to die in a dungeon. But, his successors, Generals Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe, had enough of "noun blan" (meaning white people in the Haitian Kreol language) altogether, royalists and revolutionaries alike, and removed them from what was now their island, dead or alive. For them, it was out of the question to ever be enslaved again and abused and humiliated in every way. Declaring "Freedom or death!" they destroyed Napoleon's army on the Island and proclaimed the former French colony of St. Domingue to become the independent nation of Haiti on January 1, 1804.⁷ They cut out the white stripe of the French flag, to create their own, only blue and red Haitian flag with their national seal in the center. No more whites! Haiti was the first independent free Black republic on earth. Of course, planters world-wide had a different perspective. This successful independence war of the Haitian people was their ultimate nightmare coming true. They denounced it as a "bloody slave rebellion" and demanded indemnities for their lost human "property," who were now proud free citizens

⁶ For more on Pitot see the carefully researched genealogical and historical biography compiled by his direct descendant: Henry Clement Pitot, *James Pitot (1761-1831)—A Documentary Study*. New Orleans: Bodge Books, 1968.

⁷ For a thorough discussion of the Haitian Revolution and the achievements of L'Ouverture, Dessalines, and Christophe, as well as the impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World see Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the Revolution: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004; Madison Smart Bell, *Toussaint L'Ouverture: A Biography*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2007; David P. Greggus, ed., *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, Columbus: University of South Carolina Press, 2001.

of Haiti. Napoleon lost over 40,000 soldiers in this war, including their commander-in-chief, General Charles Victor Emmanuel Leclerc, who was not only one of his best military leaders, but also his brother-in-law. The Napoleonic army killed about three times as many Haitians, an estimated 100,000 to 130,000.⁸ Survivors from the enormous bloodshed inflicted on both sides sought safety elsewhere on whatever vessel they could get. Some arrived in neighboring islands such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Curaçao, others made it to the United States.

Pitot was one of these thousands of stranded St. Domingue *refugés*. By 1794, he was in Philadelphia, where he stayed for several years, learned English and became an American citizen, changing his name from “Jacques-François” to “James Francis” Pitot. But, when rumors had it that New Orleans would become French again, he decided to move there. With its Francophone population and a burgeoning local sugar plantation industry, the city looked much more like his lost home, Cap François, than Philadelphia, and promised to be much more suitable to his business interests. Pitot was weary of Jacobinism of any sort. He had witnessed firsthand the bloody end of French aristocrats in St. Domingue. But, he also witnessed a similar scenario during a visit to France in 1792/1793, when King Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette were decapitated on the guillotine marking the end of the *ancien régime*. In fact, in all likelihood, he was in Paris during the September massacres of 1792, at which time he would have observed “with horror the head of the Princess de Lamballe being carried on a pike through the streets of Paris by the mob.”⁹ Incidentally, it was the same James Pitot, who was by chance in Paris during 1802 on a business mission, at which time the negotiations for the Louisiana Purchase happened to take place, and Pitot could produce a map drawn by none other than Barthelemy Lafon on behalf of Livingston and Monroe, then the lead negotiators for President Jefferson.¹⁰ It was the best map of the lower Mississippi Valley to date and aided greatly to the negotiations. Finally, on a sad note, it would

⁸ Paul Lachance, “Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution in Louisiana,” in Greggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, p. 225.

⁹ Pitot, *James Pitot*, p. 23.

¹⁰ James Pitot made quite a splash in Paris with “his map”, when it was actually all along Lafon’s map and his achievement alone. *Ibid.*, p. 47-53.

also be the same Pitot, who in later years of his life served as Judge for the Court of Probates in New Orleans, that in this capacity would decide over Barthelemy Lafon's succession after his death in September 1820.¹¹ In sum, men like de Boré and Pitot were French, but not that kind of French that had recently taken over their land of birth. After all, Napoleon Bonaparte was a Revolutionary and they were not fond of revolutions of any sort. By the beginning of the 19th century, Louisiana had become a happy new homeland for disgruntled and displaced, pro-slavery royalists from France and St. Domingue alike. They all must have been somewhat relieved to see Laussat leaving. Their main concern was now whether the Americans would allow them to continue the trans-Atlantic trade in human flesh that they desperately needed to fuel their promising sugar cane plantation industries.

Then, there was also Spain, who didn't leave right away, but continued to hold on to Louisiana. The Spanish army remained in the city for months after the Louisiana Purchase. The Marquis of Casa Calvo, the former Spanish governor of Louisiana and commander-in-chief of these troops would taunt Claiborne daily with their continued presence for months to come. Although Spain had a rocky start in Louisiana, when "bloody" Alexandro O' Reilly took over the Territory in 1769 with an iron fist, overall Louisianians did very well during the forty years of Spanish rule and many of them, "Don Bartholome" Lafon included, would not have minded staying under the auspices of His Catholic Majesty, the King of Spain. For sure, the proud men serving in the Spanish Free Black Militia, such as Captain Noël Carrière, would have gladly remained under the Spanish. Carrière was able to purchase himself, thanks to a Spanish legal provision called *coartaciòn* that didn't exist in the slave codes of France, Great Britain and

¹¹ "The 1812 Constitution of Louisiana authorized the legislature to establish inferior courts, and on February 10, 1813 the First District Court was established which included New Orleans Parish as it was called then, along with St. Bernard, Plaquemines, St. Charles and St. John the Baptist parishes. About a month later the Parish Court of New Orleans was established, to have concurrent jurisdiction with the First District Court in the Parish of New Orleans only. This was the court to which James Pitot was appointed as judge." Pitot, *ibid.*, p. 93; *Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne 1801-1816*, Vol. IV, ed. by Dunbar Rowland, Jackson, Mississippi, 1917, p. 260.

the United States, and could as *hombre de color libre* buy property and distinguished himself as captain in the Spanish Free Black Militia.¹² He, too, may have stood right next to Lafon in the crowd.

The only superpower that no one in Louisiana wanted to have anything to do with were the British. There was nothing redeeming about Great Britain from their perspective. They had no problems with individual British citizens joining them among their ranks, marrying into one of their local Creole families, and making Louisiana their home, like for instance the wealthy merchant Evan Jones did. That was perfectly alright. But the ruthless brutality of the British navy and the rigid British social system was the last thing they wanted to come their way. New Orleanians loathed the British and everything they stood for with passion.

Finally, there were the Americans with their new Republic, spreading free-marketism and promising to open up commerce across North America. That did look like a reasonable alternative, although they spoke English and were Protestant and had a completely foreign legal system based on Common Law. In short, they were very different in every way, but still appeared acceptable. At the dawn of the American Era, the people of New Orleans knew that they sat on a very strategic spot and were told that great prosperity was about to come their way. What they didn't know was who would benefit from that wealth and how long it would take to make that prosperous future a reality in their present time. To be clear, by the time of the official transfer of powers, the people of New Orleans had been well accustomed to Americans in their midst. It was not only rogue "Kaintocks" (meaning flatboatmen that came down the River from Kentucky) in ever growing numbers, usually drunk, in raggedy cloths, and using foul language. Increasingly, American merchants had discovered commercial opportunities in New Orleans. As the historian Eberhard Faber has made clear in his award-winning analysis of territorial New Orleans and the United States, *Building the Land of Dreams* (2016), the

¹² For an excellent analysis of the role of the Free Black Militia in Spanish Louisiana and more on the life of Noël Carrière see Kimberly Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. For more discussion of the impact of the *coartaciòn* legal practice on Louisiana's population see Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's award-winning classic, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992.

“American invasion” did not begin in 1803 with the Louisiana Purchase, but about a decade earlier following the Pickney Treaty of San Lorenzo in Spain of 1795 guaranteeing the United States free navigation of the Mississippi, the Spanish Governor Esteban Miro opened up the port of New Orleans to international commerce and provided free passage to American vessels from up the river and unlimited access to the Gulf. This triggered a peaceful “American Invasion” long before the Louisiana Purchase.¹³

Establishing the Territorial Army and Defense System

It was upon Claiborne to implement the idea of the “Jeffersonian Empire of Peace” in Louisiana. This idea appears to be peaceful superficially, but it applies only to white, landowning men, who would count as citizens. The rest of humanity, non-whites, and all women of any ethnic background and color would be left out. At that, it was hard to imagine for a Virginian planter to accept Spaniards and Frenchmen in their midst, unless they learned to speak English and became Protestants and had substantial land holdings. Then, and then only, they would have been sufficiently assimilated into their system and could be accepted as citizens. The plan was to take over all of North America and “assimilate” its foreign population into the American Republic. Not exactly all people were eligible. As of the Millions of Native Americans who were already there, they had alternative plans for them. These “savages” had to be rooted out like weeds in a garden, or turned into assimilated Anglo-Protestant citizens that would help cultivate the vast new agricultural land of the Mid-western prairies. Finally, people of African descent, had no way of being “assimilated” into the Jeffersonian vision. They had, however, a crucial role to play. There was a plan for them as well. They had to be submitted like a domesticated animal whose sole purpose in life was to serve its white master. In other words, white-supremacy played an integral role in Jefferson’s vision in particular as well as in American society in general from the onset. There was no room for free people of color in their plans for North America, except either re-enslaving them and if that wasn’t possible legally, they would be sent them back to the African continent, even if they hadn’t been there for

¹³ “Merchants, Planters, and Americanization of the Economy, 1795-1800,” in Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, pp. 39-46.

several generations and where they were to be sent, mainly Liberia and Sierra Leone, were not necessarily to the countries of origin. In short, during the first one hundred years of the new American Republic's existence, "We the people" was far from including every human being on their soil.

Military Service in Territorial Louisiana

Governor Claiborne was desperate in the beginning. He was entrusted with the daunting task of having to "assimilate" peaceably the foreign local population into Jeffersonian America.¹⁴ As mentioned above, he had landed this prestigious position mainly because he was a close political ally and trusted personal friend of Thomas Jefferson not because he was particularly qualified for the job. By comparison, his last assignment as the governor of the new American Territory of Mississippi looked like a piece of cake. The population there spoke English and consisted mainly of British and American recent immigrants. Thus, he was at least familiar with their language and basic customs. That was not the case in Louisiana. As soon as the local elite realized that he had almost no military power behind him and he himself had no military experience, he fared no better than the powerless Laussat before him. Except, the local Louisiana planters and merchants had even less use for him, than for the French interim Governor before him, because the handsome and soft-spoken Virginian, who was ruling them now, couldn't even communicate with them in their language. They attacked Claiborne, because they were enraged about the fact that the American federal government would not immediately bestow on them full citizen rights and provide them with a state of their own. They realized that they were not treated as equals compared to citizens of fully incorporated states and complained bitterly about this humiliating discrimination of being held in limbo under territorial status. When Claiborne was unwilling and unable to do anything about that, they quickly took matters into their own hands, wrote up a declaration of their concerns and demands and sent a delegation of three prominent representatives with their declaration to President Jefferson in order to personally intervene on their behalf. To no avail as it turns out. Washington remained stern and

¹⁴ "Jefferson and the Dream of Demographic Americanization," in Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, pp. 120-123.

uncooperative for nine years, until they finally achieved their goal. Full statehood was not bestowed on them until 1812.

Why were the leading Francophone planters and merchants so infuriated? Their main concern is both shocking from a humanitarian standpoint and predictable from an economical point of view. The Spanish colonial rulers had implemented a legal system that gave substantially more legal protection for the enslaved workers. In addition, it offered them opportunities to freedom and equal standing with white citizens, which were previously not possible under the much harsher French *Code Noir* from 1724 (and for that matter the even tougher legal code of the former St. Domingue regulating the institution of slavery on the Island until the Haitian Revolution). For instance, the Spanish military included Free Black Militia units, whose members consisted of well-trained soldiers and officers who had proven themselves in combat with great bravery under Governor Bernardo de Galvez and hence enjoyed considerable social recognition. Serving in the militia of His Catholic Majesty gave them impressive uniforms, a good salary, and upward social mobility in Spanish Louisiana. This favorable treatment of persons of African descent came now under attack and became concern number 1 for the new city council that consisted by majority of “sugar barons,” many of whom had ties to the fallen former French St. Domingue. These sugar planters, such as the above-mentioned Étienne de Boré, and their representatives in the council wanted to replace the Spanish code altogether and implement once again the former, far more cruel and rigid French laws or possibly adopt the even more inhumane American slave laws. To do so they needed full statehood. At the same time, the ever-so-voracious sugar cane field, where workers are literally worked to death within 5 to 10 years, needed constantly more field hands. Hence the planters’ fraction was pushing for having the right to reopen the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Claiborne’s inability to oblige to their grievances made him the target of insulting attacks from both ends, the dissatisfied Louisiana planters complaining about him to Congress and concerned fractions of Congress voicing their criticism on his lacking leadership skills. In a letter from May 4th, 1805 to President Jefferson, whom he calls “his faithful friend” he confesses his despair over his predicament while thanking his commander-in-chief for continued steadfast support:

I [...] am indeed happy to find that the ungenerous attacks to which I have been subjected, have not made on your mind impressions unfavorable to me. ...[he defends himself] to have been guided by the purest motives of honest Patriotism...[nevertheless he had been attacked and discredited...] I must confess that my feelings received a wound which could alone be healed by conscious rectitude, and a belief that the confidence of the Executive in me was not diminished.¹⁵

This letter may look insignificant in the overall scheme of affairs, but it documents beautifully a recurring characteristic of Claiborne's political leadership style. His actions were frequently led by his hurt "feelings" rather than by political prowess and foresight, or even basic common sense. Throughout his long political career in Louisiana that ended with his sudden, untimely death in 1817, he demonstrated an innate fear of conflicts. He sought persistently to diffuse conflicts between rivaling forces of any sort rather than taking one side over the other and developed in this manner a, at times astonishing, ability to forge compromises.¹⁶ In midst of hot-headed Creoles and hard-headed Americans engaging in their endless quarrels with each other, Claiborne's fear of conflicts and excessive need to come up with compromises explains certainly his longevity in Louisiana's governor's position. But, on the down side, led by "feelings" rather than political calculation or sober consideration of obvious facts, especially when he was guided by "feelings" of revenge or jealousy, also resulted in bizarre strategic mistakes on his part, as we shall see.

Meanwhile, despite all accusations that he was doing "nothing" or "not enough" from all sides, Claiborne actually made some major governmental and military changes from the beginning. Predictably, as soon as he was able to do so, he disbanded the Free Black Militia. There was no equivalent for them anywhere in the United States and he considered armed black men of any sort a "threat to public safety." The fact that these dismissed officers (including the esteemed above-mentioned Captain Noël Carrière)

¹⁵ *Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne 1801-1816*, Vol. III, pp. 37-38.

¹⁶ See Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*, pp.

together with all the men under their command had pledged their unwavering allegiance to the American flag from day one and had faithfully protected the city for decades in the past, all of that was of little concern for him. His continued misguided obsession with non-existing internal enemies endeared him to the former St. Domingue sugar barons and their allies in New Orleans. They shared Claiborne's paranoia concerning armed free people of color. After all, the successful Haitian Revolution began with a political alliance between the free Black middle class, the *gens de couleur libres*, and the oppressed enslaved working class. Ever since this auspicious alliance, *free people of color* came suddenly under unreasonable suspicion everywhere. New Orleans was no exception. Like Claiborne the Francophone sugar planters, especially the St. Domingue refugees among them, were uncomfortable with arming free black men under any circumstances. Despite all the "irreconcilable" cultural differences between Creoles and Americans that have become the stuff of countless books and conversations for the last two hundred years, the Virginian Anglo-Protestant American planters' elite (represented by Claiborne) had actually a lot in common with the French-Catholic sugar planting elite of Louisiana (represented by the Louisiana Territorial legislature council). Both groups wanted to secure their livelihood as planters and at that aimed for constantly expanding their wealth. To that effect they both supported (1) the institution of slavery and the continued trans-Atlantic slave trade and (2) the lasting creation of a race-based social hierarchy demanding white-supremacy and subordination of black and brown people.

Not only the free people of color came under attack under the new Claiborne administration. There were ubiquitous complaints from the American newcomers and from the ranks of the local Francophone elite alike, that drunk, free-roaming, unsupervised enslaved individuals were crowding the billiard halls and bars. They were accused of causing public nuisance and endangering public safety. Claiborne reacted swiftly and called for military enforcement from the federal government. But, the expensive watchmen he initially hired to secure the streets of New Orleans, were a complete and utter failure, and the military unit of about 2,000 men that eventually arrived to guard the city against a possible uprising of the enslaved, ended up even more disastrously. Most of these soldiers died miserably

of yellow fever, cholera, or malaria in the summer of 1806 shortly after they had arrived, well before they could be deployed anywhere.

At the same time, Claiborne missed completely that the enemy that threatened to destroy them did not come from within. It was an external, not an internal attack that threatened their livelihood. The Spanish had not given up on Louisiana altogether. They claimed Napoleon had stolen Louisiana from them illegally, and thus he had sold something to the Americans that he didn't own. They questioned the legality of the Louisiana Purchase altogether and wanted their vast former possessions back. For the first few years of territorial Louisiana, it looked like Spanish were willing to take back by force what they considered to be theirs all along. They had neighboring Florida and Texas at the time and rumors had it that they were planning an invasion. Luckily, that threat diffused eventually, because frankly both sides couldn't afford an armed conflict at this point. Neither the United States nor Spain had the funds to support an expensive war and the saber-rattling ended before it actually came to any combat situation.

By the end of 1806, after the fiasco with the 2,000 men that had perished of the fever, Claiborne gave up on seeking American troops from the North to help him, and created an American Militia drawing on local volunteers, which reported to him, the territorial governor, and to the legislative council consisting of locally elected representatives.

Barthelemy Lafon tried to stay neutral between all factions as best as he could. As the surveyor, he measured everybody's land, as an architect, he constructed a house for anyone, who hired and paid him, and as a businessman he engaged in trade with any group. He was officially the "approved surveyor" of the "Territory of Orleans South of Tennessee," which after 1806 was the "County of Orleans" ["Compté d'Orléans"] and he the County's "deputy surveyor." As such, Lafon was serving the entire community, at least anyone who owned land, which needed to be assessed and the boundaries of which needed to be established. Hence, he did his best to have a good rapport with the Anglophone American governor and with the by majority Francophone Legislative Council, as well as with the mayor of New Orleans (who ever that happened to be from de Bore and Pitot to Nicolas Girod, etc.) and the members of the city council. Finally, he also sought to be on good terms with the free people of color who as free

persons enjoyed full property rights even when citizen rights such as voting and being elected for public office were denied to them. Interestingly, many of the homes in what is now the French Quarter were owned by free women of color, who called on Lafon for his services. For instance, Lafon's life partner, the free woman of color Modeste Foucher, owned property and had inherited property from her mother, the late Julie Brion, who was the proud owner of numerous houses.

As soon as the territorial militia was established in 1806, Lafon dutifully joined them. On January 21, he started at the rank of first Lieutenant in the 2nd Regiment of the Louisiana Militia, and was promoted to the rank of Captain, leading the 2nd Regiment, by the end of the same year.¹⁷ That fact alone indicates that Lafon had previous military training and/or combat experience. If he had no military experience at all like Governor Claiborne would have had, he had started as nothing more than a Private. We can safely assume that Lafon didn't think twice before doing so. He became a proud American citizen, as soon as it was possible after the transfer of powers. Alone for the sake of the prestigious job of chief surveyor of the Territory ("*Ingénieur-Géographe, Député de l'Arpenteur-Général pour le Comté d'Orléans*" to be exact) that was entrusted to him, he had to be a trustworthy American citizen. As such he would have considered it his duty to defend his city and thus his chosen country at the best of his abilities. In other words, Lafon was a well-respected active member of the American military right from the beginning, as soon as it was possible for local Louisianians to enlist in the newly chartered local territorial militia. Captain was the highest rank within a militia battalion. Apparently, Lafon was not only a brilliant draftsman and surveyor, he seemed to have been similarly skilled when exchanging his ink pen and compass for a sword or a gun.

By the end of 1806, General Wilkinson had convinced Congress that New Orleans was worth defending. The U. S. Secretary of War and Secretary of the Navy, John Randolph, proclaimed on December 24th, 1806:

¹⁷ Clarence Edward Carter (ed.) *The Territorial Papers of the United States—Territory of Orleans, 1803-1812* (Washington, 1940), p. 698.

RESOLVED, that provision ought to be made, by law, to fortify and defend such position on the Mississippi, below the city of New Orleans, as the president of the United States shall designate, for the protection of that city; and that further provision ought to be made, by law, for guarding the approaches to the same from the east.¹⁸

When the “Bill for the Defence [sic] of the Mouth of the Mississippi” was ratified on January 15, 1807 in Congress, General Wilkinson writes on the same day to John Randolph from New Orleans: “The fortifications are proceeding briskly under the conduct of Messrs. Lafon and Latour.”¹⁹ Two years later, the Department of War received another letter from New Orleans. A letter by A. D. Abraham, Military Agent at New Orleans, from on March 28, 1808 to the Secretary of War states, “The engineer [Lafon?] has called on me for laborers, carpenters.”²⁰ By April 26, 1808, Col. John Toncin, the “Chief Engineer” from Washington had arrived and left saying “that he was incapable of directing the work needed.”²¹ That appears to have been the end of the Federal Government’s involvement in the defense of New Orleans for the time being. The Jeffersonian Era came also to an end in the following year. Thomas Jefferson was succeeded by James Madison, who was inaugurated March 4th, 1809 to be the forth president of the U. S. of America.

It was the end of an era in Louisiana as well. In the winter of 1809/1810, Claiborne had to burry his plan to “assimilate” Louisiana into the Anglo-Protestant American republic altogether. By then, the city of New Orleans and Southern Louisiana had received a steady influx of Americans, and with their arrival a continued process of Americanization was well on its way. However, everything changed for Claiborne, when an unexpected “invasion” took place, not by a hostile foreign army, but by about 9,000

¹⁸ *Documents Accompanying the Bill for the Defence of the Mouth of the Mississippi and for the Protection of New Orleans, and its Dependencies*, presented the 15th January, 1807, City of Washington, 1807, p. 2

¹⁹ Department of War microfilms, Doc. F-24, microcopy 221, roll 14, as initially found in Boyd Cruise’s notes in the Vertical “Artist File” on Barthelemy Lafon, Special Collections, Williams Research Center of the Historic New Orleans Collection (abbreviated as “DW” in the following).

²⁰ DW, F-24-221, roll 16.

²¹ Ibid.

refugees from St. Domingue. They doubled the city's population and changed it for good. The bloody Haitian Revolutionary War forced many inhabitants to flee the island, a large number of these refugees took shelter in close-by Eastern Cuba in and around the cities of Santiago and Baracoa. When hostilities between Napoleon and Spain mounted in 1809, an angry Spanish King threw out all of these French-speaking refugees from his Cuban Colonial Territory. These Francophone men, women, and children, about one third white, one third free people of color and one third their enslaved servants, received a special permission from Congress to be repatriated to New Orleans. About 1,000 St. Domingue refugees had already arrived in 1804 from Jamaica to make the Crescent City their home. Now the city had accommodated 10,000 *Saint-Domingue emigrés* altogether and that was the end of Claiborne's assimilation dream. These Francophone Islanders left an indelible mark on the city in every way, in terms of architecture, the sciences, the arts, as well as a myriad of cultural expressions, and in terms of language.²² Thanks to them New Orleans retained a Francophone Catholic majority, both within the white and black population and Latin culture has dominated the city to this day. Claiborne married three times and was widowed twice by yellow fever, while being the governor of territorial Louisiana. Only his first wife, Eliza Wilson Lewis, was American. His second, Marie Clarisse Duralde, and third spouse, Cayetana Susana "Suzette" Bosque, were Louisiana Creoles, born and raised. In this manner, after 9 years of Territorial Regime, it was not Claiborne, who had assimilated Louisiana into the American republic, but Louisiana who had assimilated Claiborne into their customs and ways.

Meanwhile, Barthelemy Lafon was busy measuring city lots and plantation properties, drawing up plans and issuing warrants. His three bound volumes of surveys that he left us attest to his incredible productivity during Territorial times. But by 1812, his productivity with civilian projects ended abruptly, because the U. S. Department of War had drafted him into another assignment that took over all his time.

²² For more on this subject see Lachance, "Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution in Louisiana," in Greggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, pp. 209-230; and Nathalie Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans—Migration and Influence*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007.

1812-1814: “Chief Engineer” for the Seventh Military District of the U.S. Army

On April 30, 1812, finally, Louisiana became officially the eighteenth state of the United States of America. The local Francophone elite rewarded Claiborne, whom they by now considered as one of their own, with voting for him during the gubernatorial election of 1812 in large numbers. With a comfortable first place, he won over Jacques Villeré and became the first Governor of the great State of Louisiana. However, there was a dark cloud gathering on the sky that was coming their way. Less than three months later, on June 18, 1812, the United States declared war on Great Britain.

President Madison had been pressured by the “war hawks” to enter the War to protest the brutal attacks American sailors had to endure for years at sea. The British Royal Navy was notorious to take over any American civilian or military vessel they could catch and press its personnel into the services of the British. General James Wilkinson, once again, takes over the leadership over the Seventh Military District, just like he had done for the transfer of powers following the ratification of the Louisiana Purchase nine years earlier. Lafon’s unique skills both as military captain and a French-trained engineer/architect/land surveyor, who knew the topography of Louisiana like no one else and had drawn beautiful detailed maps of his home state like no one else, made him a crucial asset to the Americans, when the War of 1812 began. Wilkinson was well aware how indispensable Lafon was. After he received orders to report to New Orleans as commanding general, he wrote to James Monroe, now Secretary of State and Secretary of War, from Washington asking whether he was “authorized to commence such defensive precautions as his judgement directed and whether he could appoint an engineer.” He arrived in New Orleans on July 9, 1812. In the next month, he reported that the hurricane of August 19-20 had inflicted extensive damage on Fort St. Philip and the other military installations in and around New Orleans and throughout South Louisiana. On September 7, he reported he had employed an engineer to lay out works at the Balize, and, four days later, on September 11, 1812, Wilkinson sent a letter to B. Lafon with the following assignment: “As per our conversation held with you and the Secretary of War—

I request your service as Chief Engineer of the Department under my command.”²³ This letter made it official, and Major Barthelemy Lafon entered the War of 1812, only three months after it began, as the “Chief Engineer” of the 7th Military Division of the United States of America. In a letter from October 1, 1812, addressed to Monroe, the Secretary of War, General Wilkinson confirms, “Mr. Lafon whom you saw and spoke with in Washington on his return here applied to be employed as an Engineer, and **as he is the ablest one in this country** [emphasis by the author]. I have provisionally employed him on such allowance as you may think—He is now at Ft. St. Philip and will inspect [...] the fascine battery to be erected below, which are indispensable for the protection of our city [...].”²⁴ Lafon went immediately to work. In the following two years, he was preoccupied with designing military fortifications for the defense of New Orleans, traveling throughout Southern Louisiana and overseeing the construction of such structures, and reporting back to the War Department about what had been implemented, or needed adjustments and repairs (Fig. 6.1). Of immediate concern were: Fort St. Charles still located within the city, where the French Quarter ends and the new Creole Faubourg Marigny was being laid out. It was located at the bottom of what is now Esplanade Avenue (The New Orleans Mint building). This was a last resort defensive point for the protection of New Orleans from downriver (Fig. 6.2); Fort St. John at the mouth of Bayou St. John, where the bayou meets Lake Pontchartrain, in case the enemy would enter from Lake Pontchartrain (Figs. 6.3, 6.4); Fort Petites Coquilles, where Lake Borgne enters Lake Pontchartrain, and in case the enemy was to enter the Mississippi (Fig. 6.5); Fort St. Leon at English Turn, about four miles below the city (Fig. 6.6); Fort St. Philips, about eight miles below the city (Figs. 6.7 – 6.8); the Fort at the Balize, where the River blends into the Gulf of Mexico (Figs. 6.19 – 6.11). These forts were essential to prevent naval forces from attacking up the Mississippi River. From there, Lafon was soon to oversee fortifications along the Gulf of Mexico all the way to Mobile and Mobile Point in Alabama to inspect and improve Fort Charlotte and Fort Boyers that were located there (Figs. 6.12 - 6.15). A sample of his astounding productivity found its way into a stunning dossier of military drawings that are now

²³ DW, F-24-221 Roll 55.

²⁴ DW, F-24-221 Roll 49

housed in the Williams Research Center of the Historic New Orleans Collection, Lafon's *Atlas of the 7th Military District*.

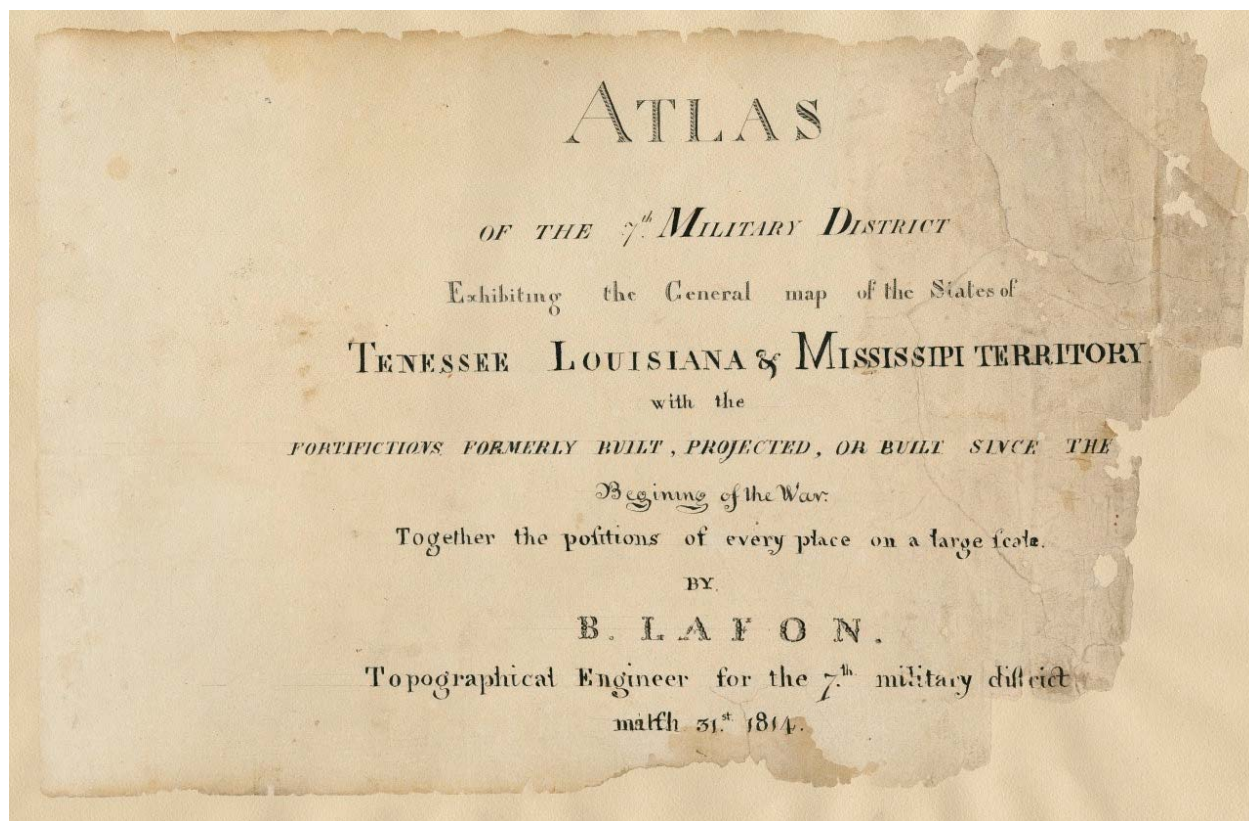


Fig. 6.1. Cover page, *Atlas of the 7th Military District Exhibiting the General Map of the States of Tennessee, Louisiana & Mississippi*, by B. Lafon, Topographical Engineer for the 7th Mil. Distr., March 31, 1814.

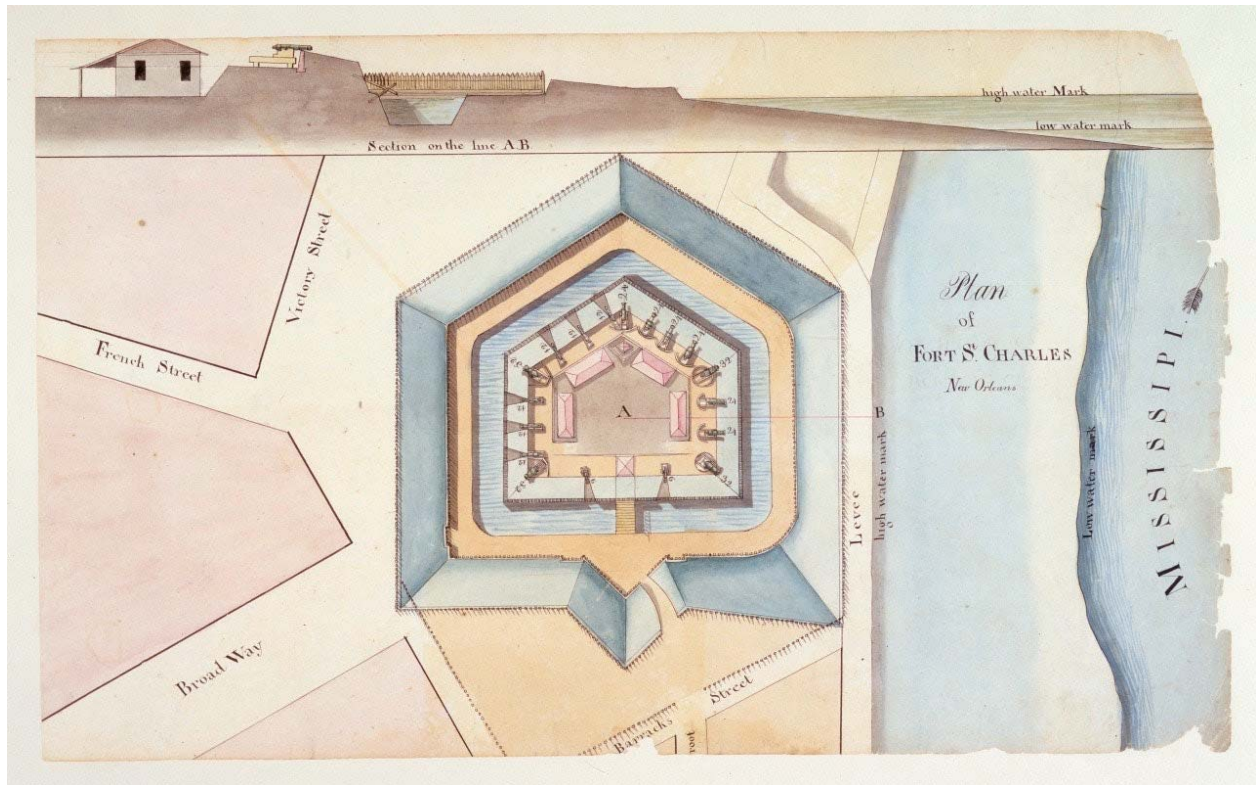


Fig. 6.2. Lafon's "Plan of Fort St. Charles," which was located at the foot of today's Esplanade Avenue [Lafon.FortStCharles.1814.HNOC.]

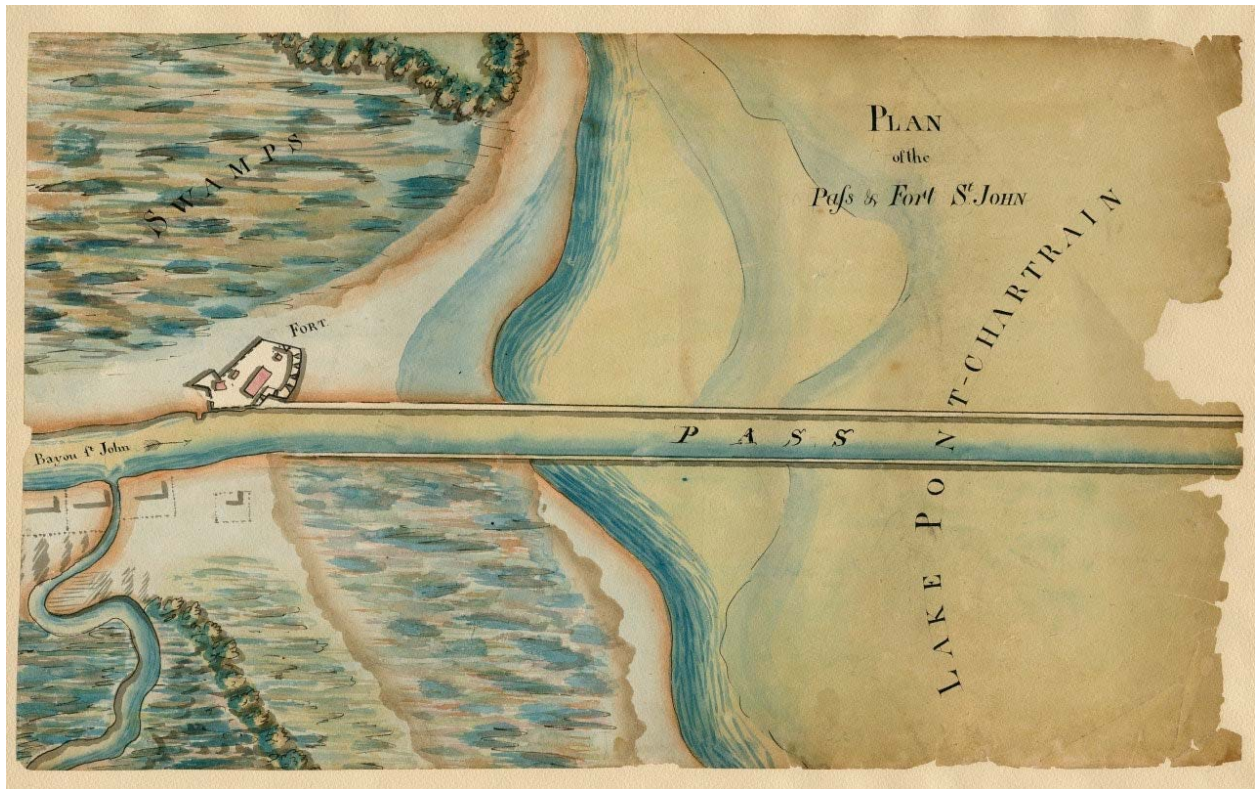


Fig. 6.3. "Plan of Pass and Fort St. John." The entrance from Lake Pontchartrain into Bayou St. John and thus into the city had been a constant concern for New Orleans since the Spanish colonial time. The "Pass" was a waterway dredged into the entrance of the Lake so that vessels would not get stranded in the shallow water near the beach. [Lafon.SpanishFort.BayouSt.John.1814.HNOC.1970.2.1-26_011_.12]

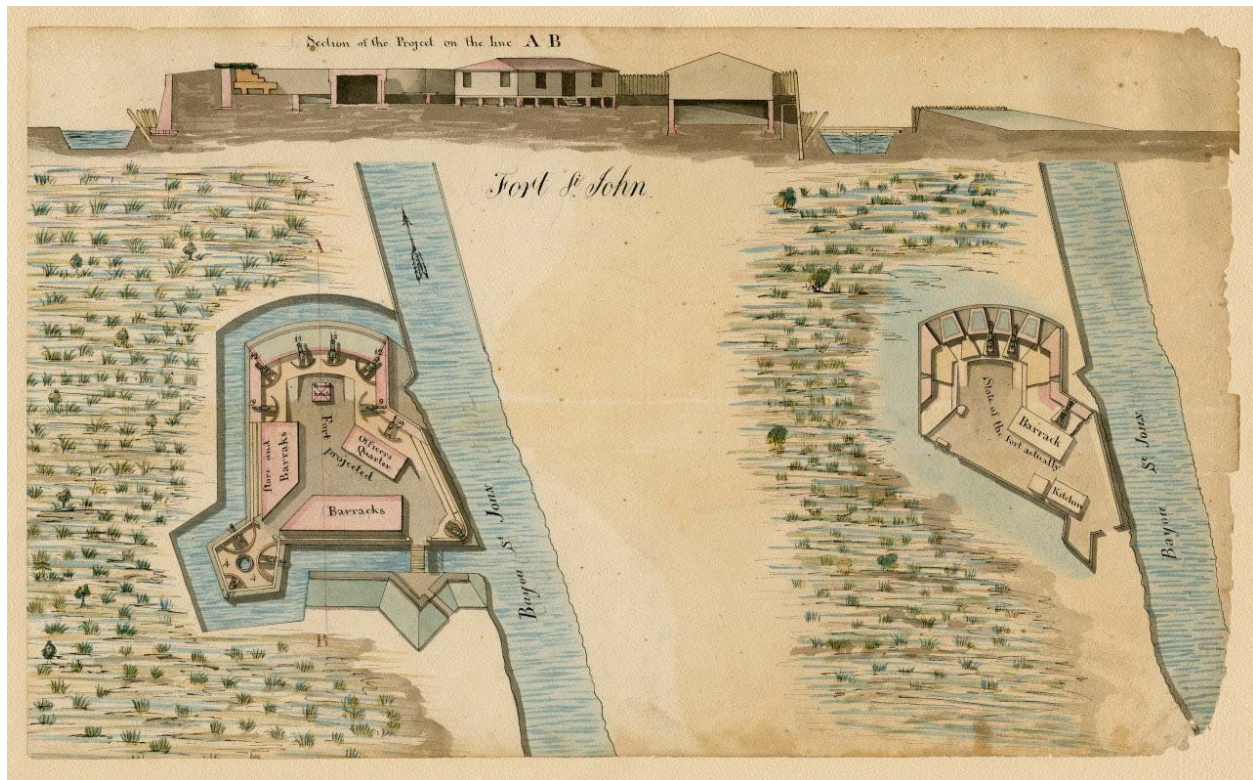


Fig. 6.4. "Plan of Fort St. John" with the proposed Fort (bottom left) and the already constructed Fort (bottom right) and the proposed side perspective on top. It is located on the West side of Bayou St. John shortly before the Bayou reaches Lake Pontchartrain. The ruins of this Fort, now called "Spanish Fort" are still there today, now surrounded by elegant homes in the Lakeview neighborhood of New Orleans. [Lafon.FortSt.John.Detail.B.St.John.1814.HNOC.970.2.1-26_012_.13]

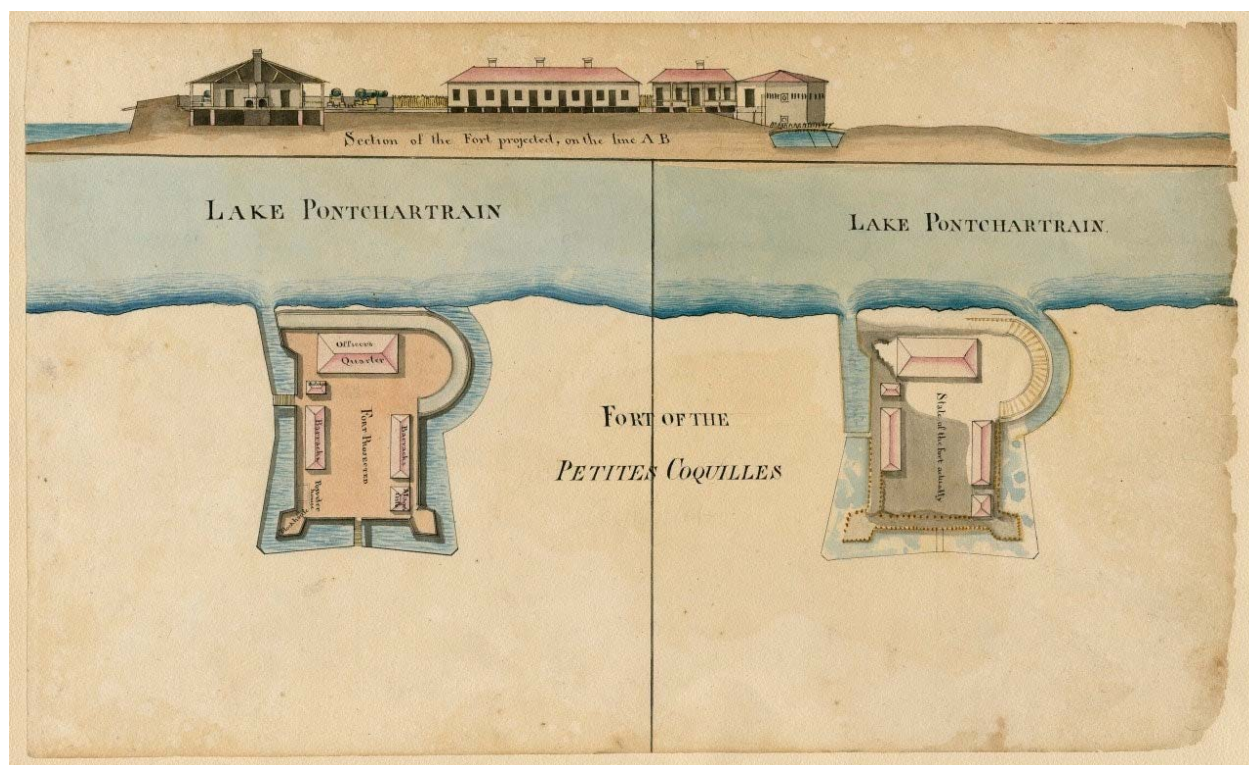


Fig. 6.5. "Fort of the Petites Coquilles," meaning the "Little Shells," here seen in various perspectives and stages of development, served to the defense against enemies entering Lake Pontchartrain coming from Lake Borgne and thus from the Gulf of Mexico. [Lafon.PetitCoquillesFort.Detail.1814.HNOC.1970.2.1-26_014_.15]



Fig. 6.6. Lafon's "Plan of the English Turn" with Fort St. Leon on the West bank, its barracks located on the East bank of the Mississippi River, including the neighboring Morgan and Tremés plantations. [Lafon.EnglishTurn.1814.HNOC.1970.2.1-26_006_.7]

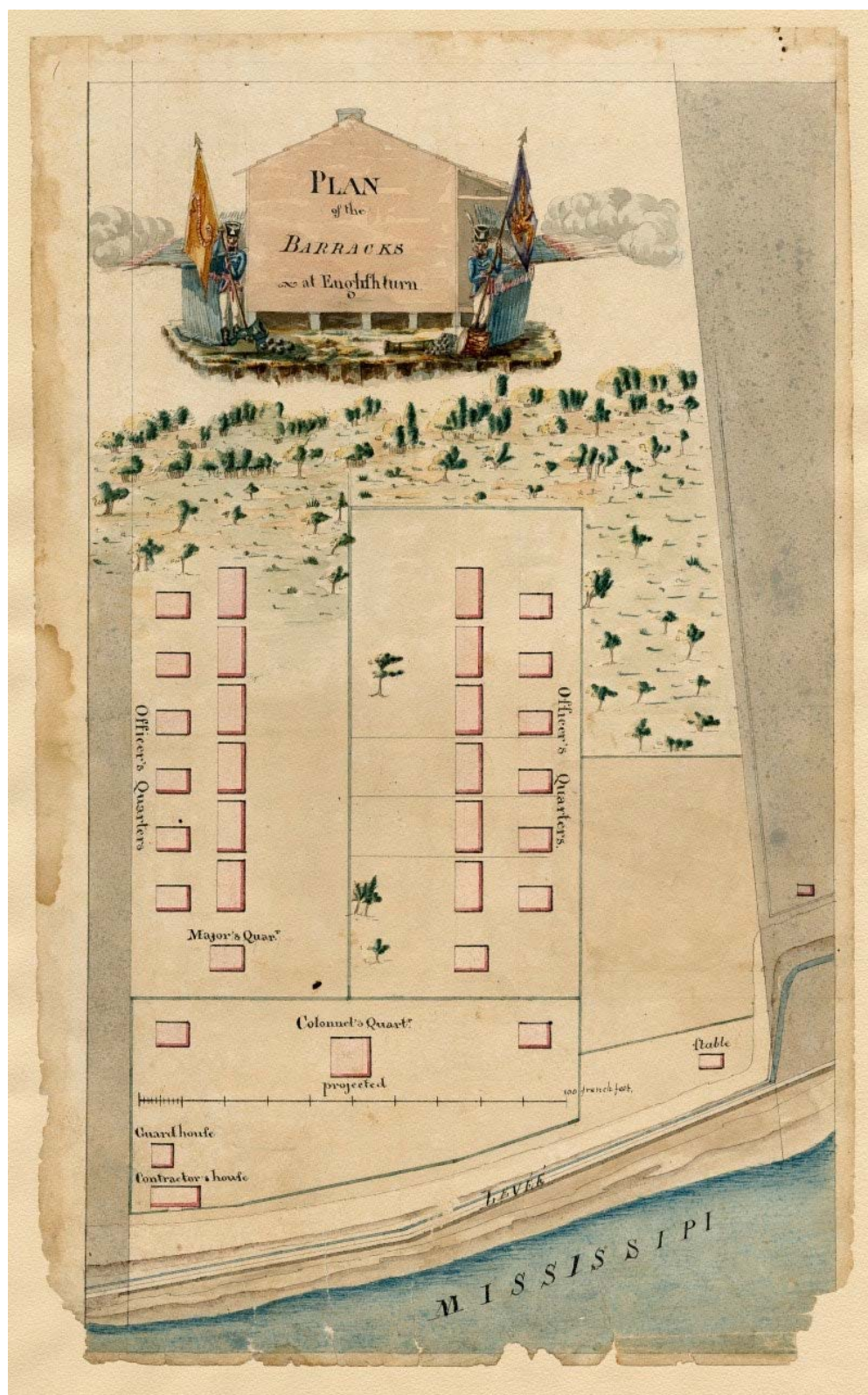


Fig. 6.7. "Plan of the Barracks at English Turn" shows the barracks in more detail than as seen in fig. 6.6 including a drawing of American soldiers on guard on top.
 [Lafon.EnglishTurn.Barracks.1814.HNOC.1970.2.1-26_008_9]

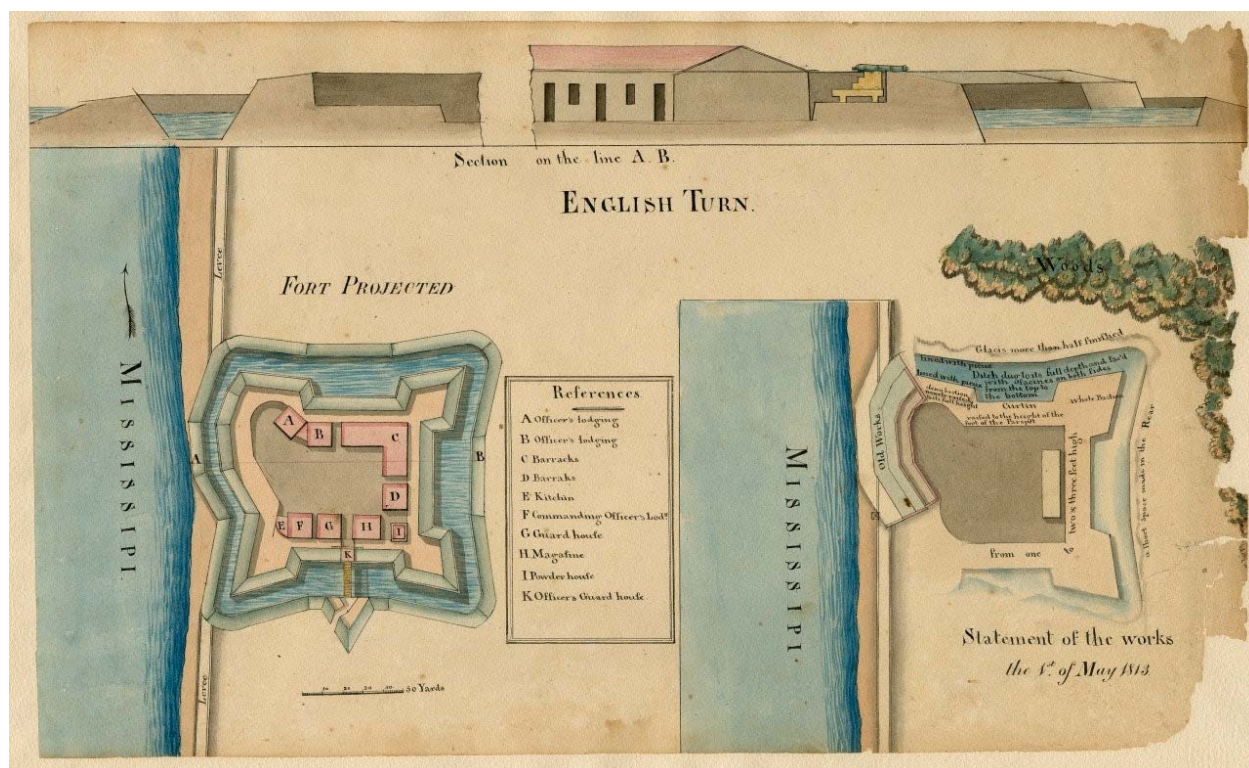


Fig. 6.7. "English Turn" Plan of the projected expansion of Fort St. Leon (left), and status of its construction as of May 1, 1813 (right) [Lafon.EnglishTurnFort.1814.HNOC.1970.2.1-26_007_.8]

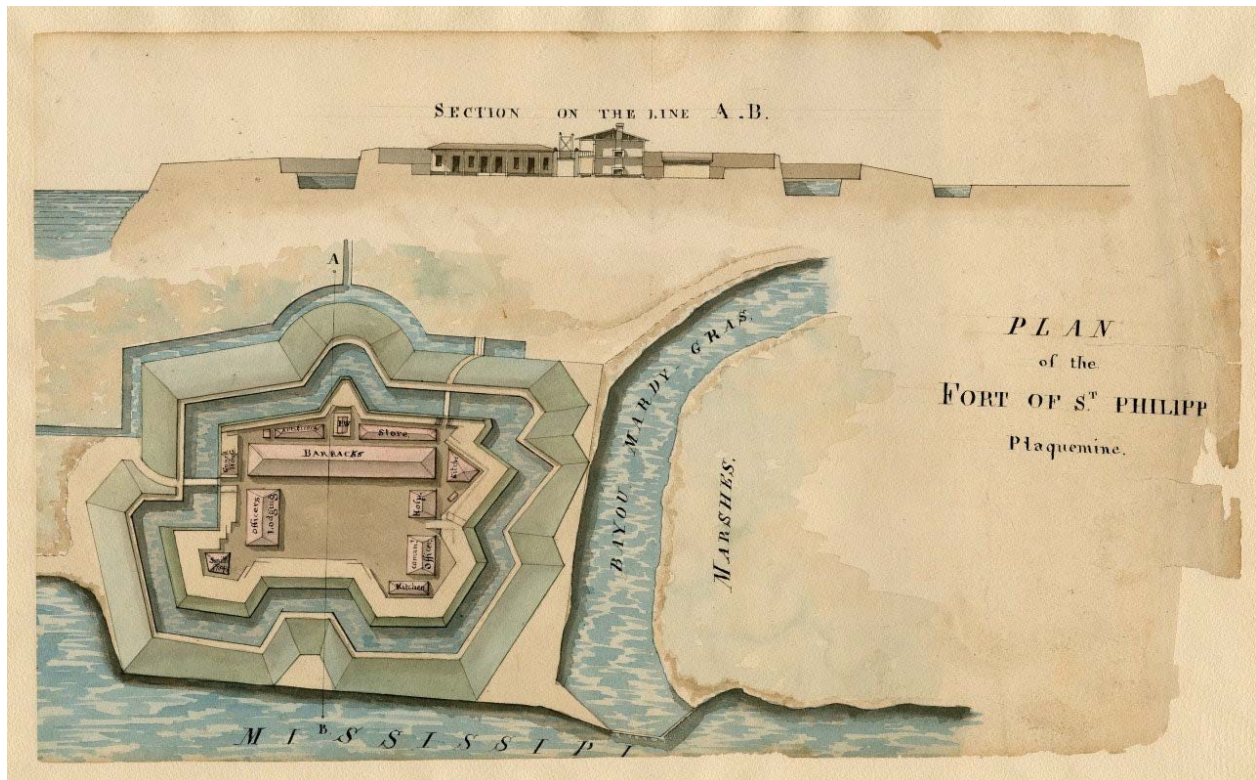


Fig. 6.8. "Plan of Fort St. Philip," which came under attack and siege by retribution-seeking British troops after the main January 8, Battle in Chalmette as they were returning to the Gulf. Their fierce siege on Ft. St. Philip proved Jackson right, who did not lift Martial Law until the Peace Treaty was signed on February 16, 1815. [Lafon.Ft.St.Phillip.Plaquemines1970.1814.HNOC.2.1-26_005_.6]



Fig. 6.10. "Plan of the Balise to show the position of the Passes" with defense forts—Overview map [Lafon.Balise.1814.HNOC.1970.2.1-26_002]

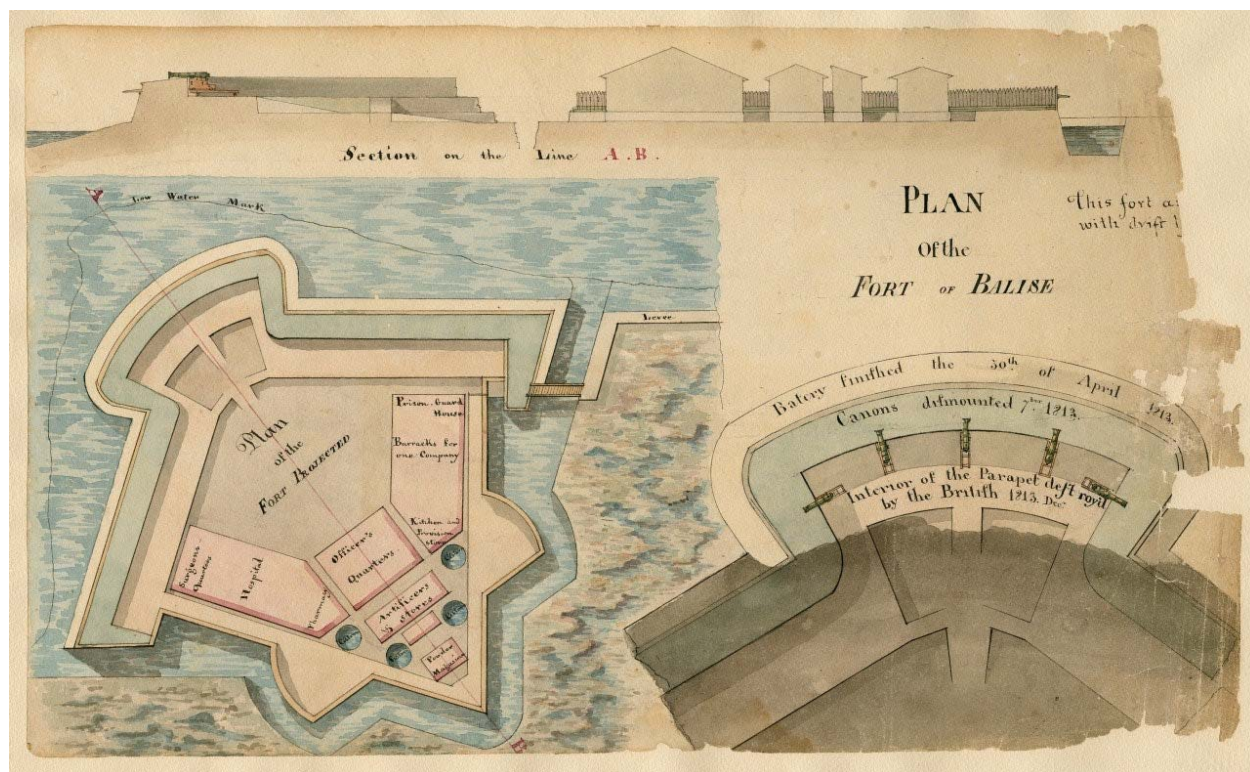


Fig. 6.11. "Plan for the Fort of Balise" with the projected Fort (left) with status report of how far the construction had progressed (right) and side view on top. [Lafon.BaliseFort.1814.HNOC.1970.2.1-26_003_.4]

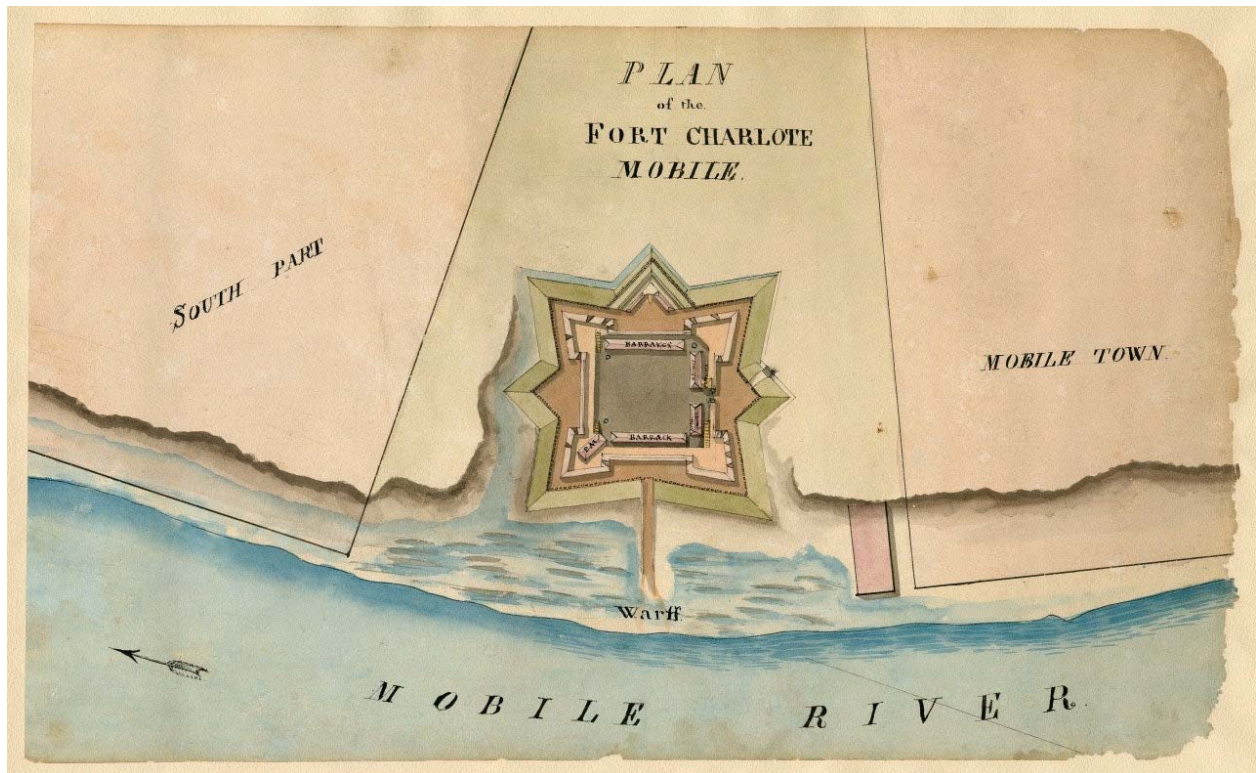


Fig. 6.13. "Plan of Fort Charlotte Mobile" located in the City of Mobile
[Lafon.Mobile.FortCharlotte.1814.HNOC.1970.2.1-26_020_21]



Fig. 6.14. "Plan of the Mobile Point with the Barracks Projected" shows Fort Boyer and the projected barracks [Lafon.MobilePointFort.1814.HNOC.1970.2.1-26_018_.19]

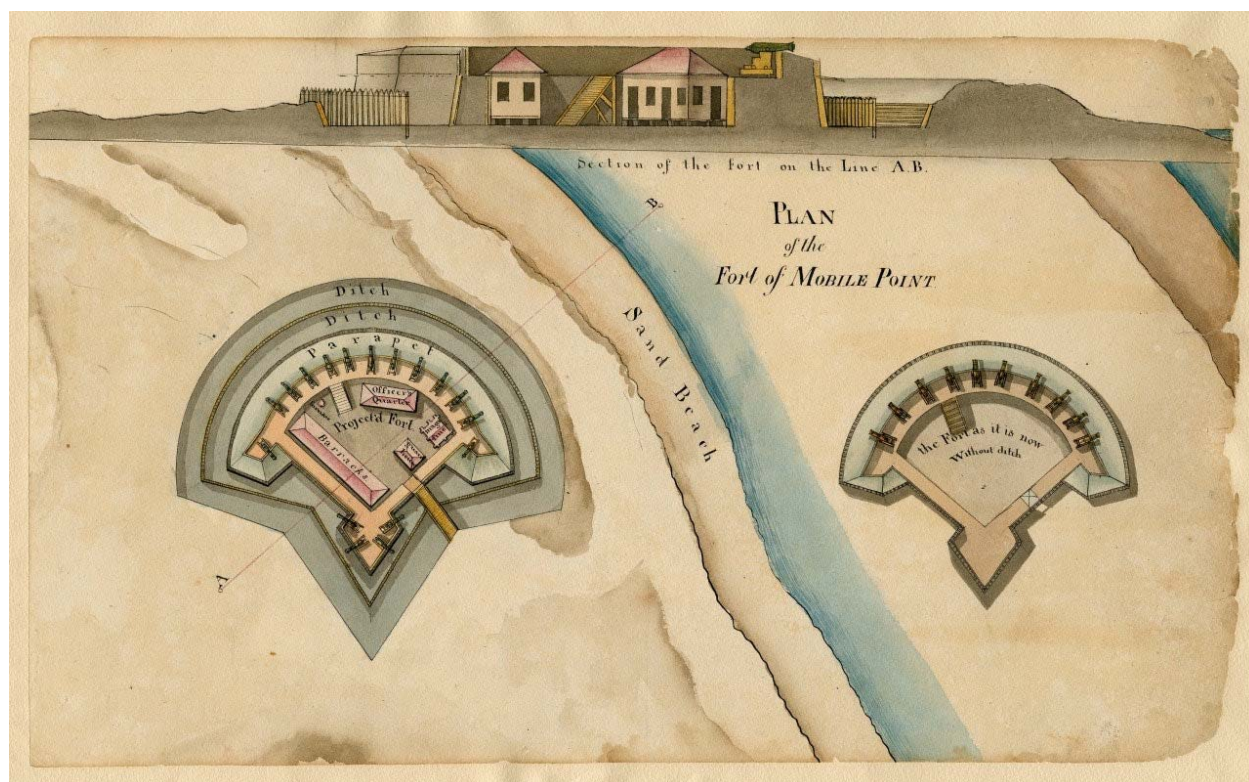


Fig. 6.15. “Plan of the Fort of Mobile Point” shows the projected expansion of Fort Boyer.²⁵
[Lafon.MobilePointFort.Detail.1814.HNOC.1970.2.1-26_019_.20]

On January 25, 1814, Lafon sends a letter to the Department of War from Fort Charlotte, stating that “he was now ordered to direct the fortifications at Petite Coquilles, Mobile, and Mobile Point.”²⁶ In a letter from February 2, 1814, a week later, Monroe, the Secretary of War, instructs General Flourney, who had taken over Wilkinson’s post as leader of the Seventh Military District, how Lafon would get paid for all his hard work: “You are authorized to pay B. Lafon the rate allowed an ass’t topographical engineer for the time he has been employed by you—and at the same rate for his future services if it is necessary to employ him.”²⁷ At the beginning of the following month, on March 1, 1814, Lafon, signing as “Chief

²⁵ Barthelemy Lafon, *Atlas of the 7th Military District*, Collection of the War of 1812, William Research Center of the Historic New Orleans Collection. The respective captions of the images are cited underneath the images.

²⁶ DW. F-24-221 Roll 63

²⁷ Ibid.

Engineer,” sends a progress report to General Flourney, the new commander of the Seventh District, to inform him about the status of affairs: “I made a report to Gen. Wilkinson in the year 1812 accompanied by a great number of plans—All the works constructed since that time, at Plaquemine, the Balize, and their dependencies have been directed by me in person and at the other works by a superintendent under my orders according to plans furnished by me—Since the works have been suspended I have still continued to execute the orders which you transmitted to me. I have both particular and general reports on the fortifications. I have personally gone to Bayou St. John, to the Petite Coquilles, to the Mobile and Mobile Point and have remained there until the works at each place were finished.” Concluding, Lafon asks the general to “induce” the Secretary of War to make him “Topographical Engineer” of the Seventh Military District since he had devoted his full time to the job.²⁸ Since the beginning of the War, Lafon had de facto executed the job of Chief “Topographical Engineer,” not of “Assistant Topographical Engineer,” and had dedicated his entire time and energy to the war effort, understandably, he requested to get paid accordingly and get promoted to what he effectively had been doing already. If there was an official letter from the Department of War granting him his request, we don’t know. So far none has been found. However, it looks like he got his wish. On March 31, 1814 he delivers his incredible “Atlas of the 7th Military District” with over 20 military drawings to his commander-in-chief, General Flourney. The title page of the atlas display’s Lafon’s title as “Topographical Engineer.” The following images offer a vivid demonstration of Lafon’s craftsmanship as a military engineer. His plans show at times multiple perspectives of the same site, or demonstrate the stages of project as the constructions are progressing. All of them are also simply beautiful. In other words, they are not only of technical importance, but also appealing as pieces of art.

The War of 1812 was for its first two year just a footnote to the larger Napoleonic Wars in Europe. There were skirmishes along the Canadian border. Canada was then part of England and the nearest place where American troops could lash out, on land, against an enemy that was so

²⁸ DW, F-24-221 Roll 52.

overwhelmingly terrorizing them at sea. The battles between Canadian British and American troops had remained inconclusive. Neither one side was able to make any significant progress. There were also conflicts between Native American allies of the British, such as the Creek Nation, who were enticed to fight against the American settlers that were encroaching their land. The British aimed at using the existing animosities between both groups to their advantage. Nevertheless, large parts of the country including Louisiana and the North-Eastern seaboard had remained untouched by the War. But that changed in the summer of 1814. After Napoleon was defeated in the Peninsular War and sent to exile in Elba (at least for the time being), the British were no longer preoccupied with fighting Bonaparte's army and could now focus on the conflict with the United States. They considered the American republic nothing more than a renegade runaway former British colony. Still hurting from the insult they had suffered during their Independence War, that the British had lost, they were eager to teach the Americans a lesson now, knowing that none of their former allies such as France and Prussia was now able to come to their aid. By the summer of 1814, Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane of the British Royal Navy ordered a large fleet across the Atlantic to attack the United States. At that time, military might had not been a major emphasis of the burgeoning new nation. The Madison Administration was not at all prepared for a major British military assault. On August 24, 1814, Cochrane launched an attack on the American capital Washington and completely destroyed the defenseless city. The Capitol, the White House, as well as all official government buildings were set on fire and burnt into the ground. President Madison, his family, and the members of Congress had to run for their lives when evacuating the premises. After this spectacular victory, the British targeted the nearby port city of Baltimore. However, luck was no longer on their side. They suffered a set-back there, lost General Ross, the commanding officer of the operation. After this defeat, the British fleet retreated to Jamaica, where they were joined by vessels from the British Caribbean and prepared for their main prerogative of this War: an attack of New Orleans. The British were in alliance with Spain at the time, who were insisting that Louisiana had illegally been sold by Napoleon to the Americans. That gave the British crown the excuse of being justified to take New Orleans with all the riches that they believed to collect there and then return the vast purchased territory

back to her righteous owner, the King of Spain. Of course, had they succeeded, they may have kept New Orleans for strategic reasons, like they kept Gibraltar and Hong Kong for similar concerns. By December of 1814, they had clandestinely arrived and began their military invasion.

Meanwhile, Lafon, now the chief “topographical engineer” of the Seventh Military District was at the height of his military career in the summer of 1814. He had been well-respected by the previous administration of Thomas Jefferson. His famous map of Louisiana and West Florida of 1806 that Jefferson had commissioned had made a big splash nationwide. After two years of military map-making for the war department of the following administration he had become indispensable for Jefferson’s war-mongering successor, James Madison, who had led the nation into the War of 1812. Lafon’s insights and construction efforts for the defense the City of New Orleans became crucial for James Monroe, the Secretary of War. But then, in September 1814, a tragic “mishap” occurred in Lafon’s life which had major detrimental repercussion for him.

1814/1815 - The War Comes Closer to Home:

General Andrew Jackson and the Battle of New Orleans.

After the fiasco in Washington, President Madison and Secretary of War, Monroe appointed Andrew Jackson to lead the 7th Military District against an impending British attack on the Southern front. The Tennessean was an odd and desperate choice. He had no formal military training and was not a professional military officer. He was a self-taught civilian serving as general of the Tennessean militia. However, his uncanny strategic skills, ruthless resolve, and stern discipline caught Madison’s and Monroe’s eyes. Jackson had led his Tennesseans into the Creek Wars in Alabama. Instigated by their British allies, Creek warriors were attacking American settlers who had established homesteads on Indian lands. After the Fort Mims massacre, where an entire village of settlers was wiped out, Jackson had rushed to their aid and inflicted a holocaust-like slaughter of Creeks in the Battle on Horseshoe Bend. That decisive victory and the fact that he was already stationed in Alabama in the South, not far from

New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico, made him an attractive candidate for the new head of the Seventh Military District in 1814. For Jackson, this post was not just an assignment. He took the War against Britain personally. British soldiers had wiped out his Irish family during the American Independence War leaving him a helpless orphaned young teenager. For him, now in his forties and a powerful general, this was pay-back-time. The British were told that the Americans were cowards and would run as soon as they showed up just like they did in Washington. They had a rude awakening in Louisiana. As it turned out, they were not prepared for an opponent with such fury and ferocious determination.

Meanwhile in New Orleans, while awaiting General Jackson's arrival, Claiborne welcomed Commodore William Patterson of the US Navy with his men and Colonel Ross of the regular Army and his men, who had reached the city by the beginning of September 1814 in order to join the defense efforts. The Governor seized the moment, once again led by his hurt "feelings." Instead of worrying about how to save the city from a major attack by the British who were on their way, meaning preparing for a major external threat, he was obsessed, once again, with alleged non-existing internal enemies. This time it was the Pirates that annoyed him. The Laffite brothers had established a lucrative smuggling ring of "privateers" that provided the city with whatever was in high demand at the time and not otherwise available. Claiborne had wanted to destroy these "criminals" for years, but the local authorities refused to comply. The tall, tough, and very "good-looking" French Pirate Captain, Jean Laffite, who brought the stolen but needed goods in, was always more popular than the empty-handed, weak, Anglophone Governor, even among the local police. The pirates had actually expressed their unwavering loyalty to New Orleans and its authorities and offered to assist with the defense efforts. A suspicious and jealous Claiborne refused their help. Instead, he convinced Commodore Patterson and Colonel Ross that the pirates were a threat, and ordered them to raid their stronghold on Grand Terre in Barataria Bay. The attack was launched on September 15, 1815. It took the Baratarians by surprise, their warehouses and ships were confiscated, and over 80 of them arrested. Barthelemy Lafon together with Pierre Laffite, Jean's older brother, were caught in the raid as their prize captives and ended up in the *calabozo* (prison)

on Jackson Square in New Orleans. This “mishap” had dire consequences for the remaining years of Lafon’s life as we shall see in the next chapter.

In the immediate future, however, help was on Lafon’s way. General Andrew Jackson arrived in New Orleans at the beginning of December 1814, declared Martial Law, mustered in a very diverse Louisiana Militia Army of more than 4,000 men and cut a deal with Jean Laffite.²⁹ In exchange for releasing all of his men and providing immunity from persecution for all of his associates, Laffite’s Baratarians would use all their artillery and man power to defend the city on the American side. In other words, they agreed to trade freedom from punishment for their crimes for patriotism. Rumors have it that a lot of whiskey may have helped, which both men were very fond of. Recent research by historian Ron Chapman suggests that Jackson and Laffite were both high-ranking freemasons and may have had connections with each other that ran much deeper than a few glasses of whiskey.³⁰ Jackson’s spokesperson and French translator, who had arranged for the meeting, was none other than the lawyer/politician Edward Livingston. He was the younger brother of Robert Livingston, who had negotiated the Louisiana Purchase. Livingston had lived in New Orleans since 1804. Escaping from a major financial scandal in his native New York he had settled in Louisiana to make money in order to pay back his debts. Edward Livingston was an old friend of Jackson, the two had met serving in Congress together years before. He was also a close friend and ally of the smuggling pirates, and he despised Claiborne, his chief rival.³¹ He had asked Jackson to forge an alliance with the pirates before, but the general wanted nothing to do with “Hellish Banditti” as he called them. Nevertheless, he changed his mind as soon as he arrived in New Orleans. Confronted with a highly-trained British army with

²⁹ For an excellent account of the Battle of New Orleans, the events that led to this fateful event and its aftermath see Ron Chapman, *The Battle of New Orleans: But for a Piece of Wood*. Self-published Xlibris, 2013. See also Drez, *The War of 1812 Conflict and Deception*. Jackson’s controversial decision of declaring martial law was at least partially based in the fact that Jackson did not get along with Claiborne. He had no patience for Claiborne’s weak-minded indecisiveness and misguided priorities. Jackson knew, if Claiborne had any say, this war could not and would not be won.

³⁰ Chapman, *But for a Piece of Wood*, pp. 75-82

³¹ For Edward Livingston’s role in Territorial Louisiana and his friendship with Jackson and rivalry with Claiborne see Faber, *Building the Land of Dreams*.

considerable artillery power, he was quick to enter an agreement with the only group in New Orleans that had heavy-duty artillery and long experience in using it. Jackson realized that he had no chance of winning this conflict without the support of the Baratarians. An added bonus was that “Old Hickory”³² and the “privateers” took an instant liking of each other. As scholars have often commented Jackson was a “my way or the highway” kind of man that didn’t tolerate dissent without deadly consequences. That form of leadership was not lost on the pirates.

From day one in town, Jackson was concerned with the surrounding forts that had to be inspected and prepared to withstand attack. What he needed quickly was a qualified chief engineer. Lafon was still in jail behind the Cabildo on the day of Jackson’s arrival. Latour was also available. He had escaped the raid of Barataria, and was given the job of chief military engineer under Jackson, based on Livingston’s recommendation. Jackson then proceeded to arrange for the release of the Baratarians. He needed them in battle and not in jail. As soon as he was freed, Lafon made himself instantly useful in the war effort. Like Latour, he helped with building fortifications against the invaders and organizing the defense. His maps assisted Jackson every step of the way. Thanks to Lafon’s hard work, there were detailed maps available of every possible angle that the British could attack. The defensive fortifications were largely in place, needing only some touching-up and manning. The suggestion of building a canal and a breastwork along the Rodrigue Canal on the Macarty Plantation, where Jackson’s headquarters were set up, was part of Lafon’s defense plans. His activities at the great Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815 are mentioned in Latour’s *Historical Memoirs*. He was not deployed in Chalmette, but supported the defense of Chef Menteur, where his plantation was located and turned into a military base.³³

³² His former militia men used to call him that because he was the toughest man they had ever seen, tough as hickory wood, the hardest wood known to them.

³³ Arsène Lacarrière Latour, *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana in 1814-15, with an Atlas*, ed. with an introduction by Gene Allen Smith, University of Florida Press, 2008, pp. xviii-xix, xxxiii, 19, 122; Lafon plantation 84-5, 137.



Fig. 6.16. A commemorative painting by Hyacinthe Laclotte, of the morning battle at Chalmette, January 8, 1865, in which Jackson's forces (left side) defeat the attacking British (right side). Painting courtesy the New Orleans Museum of Art.

The decisive battle on January 8, 1865 began early in the morning. The British opened fire at dawn as soon as a thick winter fog began to lift. They were quite visible in their bright red uniforms. The Americans at "line Jackson" stood on a breastwork along the Rodrigue Canal, still hidden by the fog. The Baratarian artillery men were not playing and began to reign fire upon their opponents, whose canons were sinking into the mud. After about 20 minutes, it was all over and more than 2000 British soldiers laid covered with blood in the battlefield, either dead or deadly wounded. The casualties included Major General Sir Edward Pakenham himself, their commander, and the brother-in-law of Lord Wellington. He was hit and perished within the first few minutes. Two more senior British generals and most of their high-ranking officers had also lost their lives. The fourth in line of command, a junior general, was

ordered to remain in the camp. He was so discouraged by the slaughter that he raised the white flag and asked for a cease-fire to recover his lost comrades. By contrast, there were hardly any casualties on the American side, five were dead and 7 wounded. Jackson agreed to the cease-fire, under one condition. He demanded the British to withdraw their forces on both sides of the Mississippi River and leave from the region altogether. “Old Hickory” knew that his spectacular victory was limited to the East bank of the River and that the British had actually gained the upper hand on the West bank and threatened New Orleans. But the shocked British representative was eager to accept Jackson’s conditions, not realizing that he had perhaps literally given away the outcome of the War.

An ecstatic jubilant crowd greeted the American soldiers in New Orleans. Jackson had gathered a motley crew of many nationalities, phenotypes, and social backgrounds, French, Spanish, Americans, free and enslaved Africans, and Native Americans. They spoke many languages and came from vastly different cultural backgrounds. Yet, this polyglot, multi-cultural bunch, were on this day of the Battle of New Orleans altogether proud Americans. They were told that the British would burn and plunder their town, and before that would happen, Jackson had threatened that he would scorch their city first before it would land in the hands of the British. Suffice it to say, there was motivation on their part to defend the city. In New Orleans people affectionately call their families, “your momma n’ them.” When it came to defending their “momma n’ them” the British had no chance.

The American victory at the Chalmette Battle Field came as a total surprise. Nobody expected it. Nobody on the local, national and on the international level had considered the Americans would overcome the army that had defeated Napoleon Bonaparte. Andrew Jackson, who was completely unknown before his success at the Southern front, rose instantly to national fame and became later the significant seventh President of the United States ushering in the Jacksonian Era. The United States was for the first time in its history recognized as a world power. The eighth of January quickly became Louisiana’s second National Independence Day. Indeed, until the Civil War it was celebrated annually with victory parades throughout the United States. Neither Britain nor Spain were capable of recapturing Louisiana. Both were forced out of the territories of the United States.

One group of splendid heroes who had aided Jackson with this unexpected victory did not fare well in the aftermath of the War. They were the Baratarians including Barthelemy Lafon. We will examine their situation and Lafon's role in this group in more detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Throughout Louisiana's tumultuous Territorial Period and for eight years of statehood, Barthelemy Lafon had acted as ardent and loyal American Patriot. He should be remembered as such. Even when it was to his personal detriment and when compensation for his service was inadequate or absent, he maintained his support of the United States. This included his mapping of many possible defenses of New Orleans and elsewhere along the Gulf coast, and working as an on-site engineer in the strengthening those defenses, jumping into the trenches and directing hands-on construction.

As we have seen, General Wilkinson, heading the Seventh Military District, and James Monroe, the Secretary of War of the Madison Administration, reached out to Lafon right from the beginning of the War. They knew what his skills were and were well aware that he would be an invaluable asset to the war effort. They appointed him as the "topographical engineer" of the Seventh Military District. In this capacity, he created his "Atlas," an amazing portfolio of military drawings. One version of this portfolio is in the possession of the Historic New Orleans Collection. However, extensive though it is, it by no means contains the complete collection of the surveys and drawings that Lafon actually produced over the duration of the War. It does, however, provide clear evidence of Lafon's genius in military engineering. He began work on the military project in 1806, and finished it in the hectic rush to fortify the Gulf Coast in 1812-1814. This well-documented work proved the worth of the labor that he had invested in it. As a defensive blueprint for Jackson, it played a substantial role insuring his spectacular victory on Jan. 8, 1815. Additional information on Lafon's military accomplishments are to be found in the archival records of the U.S. Department of War. They document Latour had been working with Lafon on the defense lines for New Orleans starting in 1806 under the Jefferson Administration. When Jackson quickly bestowed on Latour the post of "Chief Engineer" for the Seventh Military District in December 1814, he was not new

to the job. As we have seen, he had collaborated with Lafon on-again-off-again for years before then. With intimate knowledge of Lafon's plans, he knew how to implement them quickly. Lafon had put everything in place, but it took a decisive, charismatic, and determined leader like Jackson who could put Lafon's plans into action. In other words, Jackson's "miracle" on the Chalmette battlefield, did not just suddenly fall from the sky so to speak. Lafon had been working toward this end for a whole decade before that day and without his mapping and building skills and his unwavering dedication to New Orleans, Jackson and his citizen soldiers might not have made his "miracle".

CHAPTER 7.

LAFON, THE INFAMOUS PIRATE:

His Double Life as Privateer and Secret Agent.

Ina Fandrich

“No good deed remains unpunished” (traditional proverb).

Perhaps the most troubling and surely the most controversial aspect of Barthelemy Lafon’s biography is his double life as “privateer” and secret agent. Indeed, he did have a criminal record, and a substantial one at that. Nearly everyone who has looked at his impressive life achievements has been vexed by the nagging question: How is it possible that a nationally-known American patriot, the famous engineer, architect, and surveyor Lafon, admired for his skills by Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison themselves, how could such a noble character of substantial means possibly be working simultaneously as an infamous pirate (or “privateer” as the Baratarians preferred to be called), an illegal smuggler, and even a secret agent of a foreign nation? Was he a “Dr. Jeckel and Mr. Hide” kind of character with a criminally insane split personality or were there “mitigating” circumstances that “forced” him into piracy?

Hollywood, it seems, has always had a soft spot for “noble” outcasts and criminals. Pirates fit perfectly that category. Film makers have continuously romanticized their adventurous lives thus elevating their reputation. The *Pirates of the Caribbean* sequence with Johnny Depp as Captain Jack Sparrow in the lead role is certainly the best-known example for this phenomenon today. It started a whole pirate frenzy world-wide. But classics such as *The Buccaneer* from 1958 has done just that. Calling pirates “buccaneers” in this film is a euphemism. They are none other than the Baratarians, who seized ships and killed resisting people in the process. The actor Yul Brunner stars as a mysterious Jean Laffite, the infamous pirate leader of the Baratarians. The movie turned Laffite’s life story into a kind of soap opera. He is depicted as an enigmatic tragic character, who had a tough life, but was good at heart and ultimately a great patriot. In the end, is able to redeem himself. We know that happened only in the movie. The real

Jean Laffite remained an outcast after his heroic patriotism in the winter of 1814 -1815. There was no redemption. If anything, it was after his heroic efforts and substantial contributions to the successful defense of the city that he was rejected and forced to leave.

When and why then did the Laffite brothers establish themselves in Baratania and New Orleans? When and why did Lafon and so many others join the Baratarians? Didn't they know that they were criminals? And why were the Baratarians suddenly persecuted after they had proven themselves as loyal and valuable patriots while they had been ever so popular before the War of 1812?

Unlike Hollywood's film industry and its fascination with the "bad" guys of history, architecture historians of the 20th and 21st century seem to have a hard time with accepting that Lafon was a pirate. This unease with his complex life story may explain why there is to this day no published biography of Lafon. The only lengthy study of his life achievements we have is the unpublished master thesis in architecture by Harriet Bos (1977).¹ There are numerous short biographies, such as entries in biographical dictionaries. Most were published following Bos's work, and have drawn upon it. All of them want to stress how educated Lafon was and how exceptional his skills as engineer, geographer, and architect were, and that the only reasonable explanation for his piracy was financial despair. While this may hold true for the final years of Lafon's life when his professional career was faltering, his involvement in piracy precedes this period by many years. Pirate historians William Davis and Ron Chapman have stressed that Lafon was a pirate all along.²

As we have described in chapters 2 and 6, from the time of the Louisiana Purchase until Lafon's death in 1820, the ups and downs of his personal drama were inseparably intertwined with the fate of the

¹ Harriet Pierpoint Bos, "Barthelemy Lafon," M.A. thesis, Tulane University, New Orleans, 1977.

² Among the over 30 books that have been written about the Laffites, the most extensive study of the Baratarians is William Davis, *The Pirates Laffite: The Treacherous World of the Corsairs of the Gulf*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Hartcourt, 2006. Davis suggests Lafon collaborated with the Laffites as early as 1802, in Saint-Domingue (p. 7), but he offers no documentation to support his assertion. Nevertheless, nearly every author that has examined the connection between the Laffites and Lafon, states that they had been close friends and allies years before the War of 1812. Since Davis's study of 2006, local New Orleanian historian Ron Chapman has published a fresh and insightful history of the war effort. *The Battle of New Orleans: but For A Piece of Wood*, 2013, which contains additional new information on the Baratarians and their role in the War.

Laffite brothers, the leaders of the Baratarian Privateers. In the following, we offer a brief account of their rise to power and influence during territorial times, their fall in September 1814, their brief resurrection to patriotic glory during the Battle of New Orleans in January 1815, and their ultimate defeat and exile in the aftermath of the war. In this connection we are not seeking to provide an exhaustive account of the Laffites, other historians have done so. Most notably among them is the extensive study of the “Corsairs of the Gulf of Mexico” by William Davis, in which he retraces the lives of the Laffites (as far as it is possible) with great detail and a remarkable amount of data and insights. Nor do we aim for offering in the following an exhaustive report on Lafon’s “achievements” as a pirate and a foreign spy. The definitive study on his criminal record has yet to be written. Rather we want in this final chapter to simply provide some suggestions as of how this inconvenient “dark side” of Lafon fits into his over-all life story.

Claiborne vs. Laffite, Round 1:
The Rise of Entrepôt at Barataria, 1803 to 1812.

Pirate historians have noted that the rise of piracy worldwide and throughout the ages always occurs within a power vacuum, meaning, in a region where a weak government has insufficient military power to provide peace and order along its coast lines. Once the respective regional government has gained in military strength, it will do its best to root out the pirates. The fate of the powerful pirate syndicate in the Mississippi Delta of Early American history led by the Laffites was no exception.

The Baratarians and their influential stronghold on Grande Terre were the direct byproduct of the basic principles of the Jeffersonian Empire implemented under Claiborne in Louisiana. Jefferson was suspicious of any strong military. Armies and navies should receive only limited funding. Instead, an “American Empire of Liberty” would spread and absorb its surrounding lands, one by one, peacefully, into its fold. Neighboring populations would be enticed to join this empire voluntarily because it held out the promise of future prosperity and peace. Hamilton and his Federalist Party disagreed. They criticized this lofty idea as utopian nonsense. The “real” world is brutal. Every country needs a strong military in order to

defend itself. Hamilton, as he had so often shown, was right. Governor Claiborne was a staunch promoter of Jeffersonian ideals. He is said to have avoided conflicts and confrontations as best as he could and was truly abhorred by violence of any sort. The only time we know of when he actually took a pistol to shoot someone was his infamous duel against his archrival Daniel Clark, and in this duel, he lost and suffered injuries that took many months to heal. Throughout his political career he was described as a “weak” leader. Although he enjoyed toward the end of his political career in Louisiana substantial popularity and political strength he continued to be depicted in this manner. Hence, he was a “weak” promoter of a “weak” policy so to speak, leaving the door wide open for illegal activities to mushroom right under his nose.

It is true, as long as powerful Spanish governors controlled the mouth of the Mississippi with an iron fist, there were hardly any pirates in sight anywhere in the region. Don Bernardo de Galvez, the great hero among Louisiana’s nine Spanish governors, cleared not only the Louisiana coastline of piracy, during the American War of Independence, he supported the United States on the Southern front and chased the British Army out of Florida and the entire Gulf of Mexico. After all, Louisiana was for the Spanish mainly a strategic possession, a buffer zone to ward off the British from their precious mineral wealth originated. Galvez’s successors, though far less powerful, were also professional career military officers who would do their best to keep pirates away from the precious cargo that was shipped regularly from Spanish Mexican ports in the Gulf via Cuba to Spain. But as the Spanish Empire began to crumble toward the end of the eighteenth century under King Carlos IV, there was an opening for illegal seafaring smugglers to move in. When then in 1803, an even weaker (militarily) American Republic took over possession of Louisiana, while Great Britain, France, and Spain were pre-occupied with fighting each other in Europe, a substantial power vacuum emerged in the Gulf of Mexico. In other words, an ideal fertile ground for piracy to flourish opened up. Not coincidentally, the emergence of widespread piracy in the Chesapeake Bay occurred about the same time. In an historical parallel, it was Chesapeake pirates who helped the Americans ward off the British in Baltimore in August 1814. The British navy retreated to Jamaica, from whence launched their new attack on New Orleans the following November. Smaller pockets of piracy

along the Eastern seaboard sprouted everywhere. However, the largest and most powerful American pirate syndicate of the Jeffersonian Era was the Baratarians who established themselves just below New Orleans terrorizing vessels within the entire Gulf region.

Besides the general power vacuum on the political and military level, there were also geographical reasons that fostered the success of the Baratarians in piracy. About one third of today's state of Louisiana, which was then the "Territory of Orleans," is naturally swampland, also known as "the" great American wetland, twenty times larger than the Everglades of Florida. Today, Louisianians are filled with much anxiety because their vast wetlands are rapidly disappearing, but that is another story altogether. During the Early American Regime in Territorial Louisiana, the vast cypress swamps, "quakeing prairies," and floating marshlands covered the area. These were fed by overflows from the mighty Mississippi/Missouri drainage basin through a complex system of rivers and distributaries and bayous, before they enter the Gulf. These swampy thickets provided shelter for Maroons (enslaved runaways) during the period of Spanish sovereignty.

Of note in this connection is "Gaylordland," the Maroon community in the swampland Northeast of New Orleans, today's Lower Ninth Ward. It was established by the charismatic and fearless Maroon rebel, St. Malo, who plays to this day a major role in South Louisiana's folklore. The dogs of the planters couldn't follow them into the swamps and back to their hideouts. They quickly adapted to the marshlands, becoming less scared of alligators than of their would-be legal owners. By the same token, seafaring smugglers and pirates, mainly of French extraction, sought shelter in the coastal bays and bayous. Jean Laffite was French, from the Bordeaux region, probably Basque. He was displaced by not one, but two Revolutions, first in France and then in Haiti. Like so many in New Orleans, he was a *Saint-Domingue* *refugé* of sorts although certainly not a displaced planter of the *ancien régime*. Davis and other historians suggest that the Laffites were involved in aiding fleeing French people to escape the massacre in soon to be Independent Haiti and shipped them to safe havens such as New Orleans. They were doing so illegally, by American standards, and maybe for profit. Once involved in illegal smuggling activities, they found on the Island of Grand Terre in Barataria Bay a perfect home. The Island allowed access for big vessels from

the open sea of the Gulf on one side. These larger vessels would fill their warehouses on Grand Terre. On the other side of the Island they could reload their cargo from the warehouses into smaller shallow-draft boats that could navigate the swamps and bayous and transport their cargo into New Orleans and to Donaldsonville on the Mississippi River. Their trade increased exponentially under the early American administration.

The precarious situation and ultimate collapse of French Saint-Domingue leads us also to the economic reasons of piracy to emerge in Early American Louisiana. Before the Haitian Revolution, Saint-Domingue was France's most profitable colony. Covering only one third of the Island of Hispaniola, it became officially French through the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697 and had grown by mid-century into the fifth largest economy in the world. This was an incredible economical achievement and attracted financial speculators from everywhere similar to the gold rush in California a century later. The reason for this remarkable French economic success story is nothing that France is proud of today. It depended upon the relentless exploitation of hundreds of thousands of enslaved African workers. Across the Atlantic World, over thirteen million enslaved men, women, and children were deported from various African nations to feed the voracious plantations of the New World. Sugar cane workers had an especially dangerous job that led quickly to deadly accidents. The axe, for example, was a ubiquitous tool kept next to the three-roller *trapique* cane mills, and present in almost every sugar plantation on Saint-Domingue. Its function was to amputate the arms of unlucky workers who got tired feeding stalks of cane into the rollers, letting their hands get sucked into the rollers. There was no emergency release mechanism. The average life span of the enslaved was short.

The average life span of the enslaved was short. If they didn't perish from being overworked, they often died of punishments or deadly diseases. While the cruel exploitation had no limits, profits skyrocketed. The booming economy attracting not only planters and merchants, but also scientists and artists, brokers, traders and entire companies such as banks and exchanges, which made their fortunes from sugar sales. In addition to the sugar industry, there were also coffee, indigo, and rice plantations that were yielding profits, but sugar was the main cash crop. It was called "white gold." The whole world had

developed an appetite for sugar and was willing to pay high prices to satisfy the constantly rising demand. Huge populations of enslaved Africans, unpaid, yet indispensable ingredients of sugar production, were widely dehumanized.³

When the cane fields of Saint-Domingue went up in flames in the revolutionary War, the profits went up in smoke with them, but the world-wide demand for sugar had not changed and needed to be met. Many of the surviving sugar-barons fled to New Orleans and discovered to their delight that the swampy ground of Southern Louisiana could also produce sugar cane. It was not quite as fruitful as Saint-Domingue was. Louisiana weather was sub-tropical with three months of cooler temperatures than tropical Hispaniola. Hence, the Louisiana sugar harvest had to take place over a shorter growing period, producing proportionally less cane juice per stalk. Harvests occurred once a year, while the growing season in the tropics was longer.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Louisiana's sugar production expanded rapidly despite the high initial investment costs to run a sugar business because of the high global demand at the time. The Spanish had re-opened the trans-Atlantic slave trade toward the end of their reign to satisfy the increased demand for "black gold" needed in the growing sugar fields. However, the United States, who were the new rulers of Louisiana after 1803, were hesitant to allow the Louisiana planters access to any kind of slave trade. By 1808, the United States abolished the trans-Atlantic slave trade altogether. The inner-American slave trade from the upper South to the lower South did not begin until well after the War of 1812. In the meantime, Louisiana planters had invested in costly sugar plantations and sugar production equipment and needed a constant flow of African field hands in order to make their investments profitable. But, there was no legal way open to them to attain "black gold" in the amount that was needed. Hence, there was a "golden" opportunity for the pirates to steel African human cargo from foreign vessels of countries that still engaged in the trans-Atlantic slave trade such as Spain, Denmark, Holland, and

³ African slaves were often referred to as "black gold," "*pièces d'Inde*" ("units for the Indies trade)," and "*bozales*" (*boçal* - Portuguese: an ignorant or unacculturated person). The highest term of praise for an enslaved African woman was "black wench." An African child was a pickaninny (Portuguese Creole for "small African)."

Portugal, as well as illegal slave traders from other countries. The Laffite brothers' main income was through the capture of enslaved Africans on the high seas. There was a certain irony to that, because many of the men that had joined the Baratarians were of African descent themselves, free men of color, and should have objected to this cruel exchange. Furthermore, the Baratarians prided themselves of their freedom and acceptance of everyone while their main profits came through the trade in bonded fellow Africans. In addition to the coveted "black gold" the Baratarians collected during their raids whatever they could catch and the warehouses on Grand Terre were full of wine, whiskey, precious fabrics, livestock, jewelry and silver ware that was illegally gained.

How did they get away with it? They were participating in a popular world-wide movement of "privateering." It started with the rivalry at sea between the British and the French worldwide as their colonies were spreading around the globe. Eventually, these two rivaling powers encouraged "private" vessels to participate in their on-going world-wide war at sea. Shipowners would receive "letters of marque" that authorized them to capture other vessels on behalf of the country that had issued their "marque" meaning their official seal. Hence, anyone who signed up in this manner to join the war efforts at sea with a private vessel became a "privateer." It was piracy, but with a "noble" patriotic cause so to speak and the added benefit that if caught in piracy they would receive mitigating circumstances in court. The Laffites and their Baratarian associates were such "privateers," at that they selected very cleverly on whose side they would fight. Since Jean Laffite didn't trust any major political power for good reasons he secured a "marque" from *Cartagena*, an ostensibly free independent pirate republic located on the north coast of Columbia. In this manner, the Baratarians could justify that they had the "right" to seize and plunder any vessel in their reach.

The illegal warehouses of Grand Terre and their semi-secret, illegal locations in the city of New Orleans, were soon frequented by nearly any person of means in Louisiana. They were particularly popular with wealthy planters, and displaced representatives of the *ancien régime* including former royalists from Saint-Domingue and Bourbon France. Even American newcomers participated in the illegal trade. Lawyers were well-represented among the regulars on Grand Terre: Edward Livingston, John Randolph

Grymes, and Moreau Lislet prominent among them. The only one in New Orleans, who detested the Baratarians with passion seems to have been Governor William C. C. Claiborne. No tax revenues flow from illegal smuggling businesses and that meant a financial loss for his government. The very existence of the pirates demonstrated Claiborne's powerlessness. Oral legends from Louisiana's folklore recount how Jean Laffite and his men taunted and mocked the governor while all the official representatives of the city council, the legislature, and commanding officers of the militia persistently turned on Claiborne and took the side of the Pirates.

In short, Claiborne v. Laffite - Round 1 can be summarized as: Claiborne, powerless to control the situation, suffers under the widespread power of the informal economy and the popular distain of the Baratarians. When it comes to Lafon in this period, we know very little for certain, except that his vessels were frequently docked in Grand Isle and that he was a close friend of the Laffites. Since he worked closely with Claiborne and the Territory's official deputy surveyor, he would have tried to keep his involvement with the Laffites as low key as possible. but, as a man of means and a fellow French-born émigré from the Southwestern corner of France who was also a self-made entrepreneur, and probably spoke their Basque language, his association with these follow homies would have been perfectly natural. As a passionate explorer and keen observer of geographical landscapes, he was well familiar with the bayous and pathways which crossed Southern Louisiana's vast and swampy lands. His explorations of Louisiana's landscapes had by his own admission begun ten years before the Americans had arrived, but when he became the official chief land surveyor for the entire Territory of Orleans, he remained professionally engaged in measuring and charting those very landscapes, not only for private property owners, but also for the American Federal Government itself. It would have been unusual for Lafon not to have exchanged ideas and information with the Baratarians on the mysteries and features of the vast swamplands south of the city of New Orleans. In addition, he may have viewed piracy as part of his expanding business ventures. Judging by Lafon's countless activities throughout his life, he was a risk taker who would jump quickly on new business opportunities. There were also commonalities on a personal level. The life partners of the Brothers Laffite were two sisters in New Orleans, who were

entrepreneurial-minded property-owning free women of color like Modeste Foucher, Lafon's domestic partner. And we know that the Laffites, like Lafon, were freemasons who would have known one-another from their lodges. Considering all of these factors, the Laffites and Lafon would have become close friends and trusted allies who could easily collaborate on shared projects and "business" ventures.

Claiborne vs. Laffite, Round 2:

The Rise and Fall of the Baratarians During the War of 1812.

Just months before the War of 1812 began, Louisiana gained statehood. Claiborne won the first election by comfortable margins and was sworn in as the first Governor of the State of Louisiana. By this time he was well-familiar with his constituency including the local sugar barons. His policies had increasingly favored the planter elite and members of the *ancienne population*. As the Governor of a state, with the soft power to appoint, and direct access to hard power in the form of the state militia, Claiborne's influence grew substantially. That became evident in the fall of 1814, with the imminence of the British invasion. He ordered Commodore Robert Patterson to raid Barataria.

On September 3, 1814, a British vessel, the *HMS Sophia* under the command of Captain Lockyer from the British Royal Navy anchored six miles from Barataria Bay and "announced its visit with a cannon shot." Lockyer requested a meeting with Jean Laffite and was soon invited to an elaborate meal at "The Temple," as Laffite's headquarters on Grand Terre was called.⁴ Admiral Cochran's intention was to strengthen the forthcoming British position by bribing the Baratarians to support them. To this effect, he sent Lockyer to make Laffite an offer. He promised him a financial reward of \$30,000 as well as an officer's position in the British Royal Navy and pardons for all his men if he would only join the British. Historian Ron Chapman explains: "The British needed intelligence about hidden approaches to New Orleans and the Laffites's smuggling operations could prove vital."⁵ But Laffite, who distrusted the

⁴ For more on the "Temple" see Chapman, *But for a Piece of Wood*, pp. 68-70.

⁵ Chapman, *But for a Piece of Wood*, p. 63.

British altogether, stalled them with his for time to consider the offer. While the British delegation returned to their ship, Laffite wrote a letter to Claiborne which he gave to a trusted friend, Jean Blaque, a respected banker and real estate investor in town. Blaque was the cousin of French Prefect Laussat, who had accompanied the latter on his mission to transfer Louisiana back to the French from the Spanish. But Laussat administration lasted only twenty days, and the Americans became the new owners of Louisiana. Laussat left, but his cousin Blaque opted to stay. He had married a local planter's daughter, Delphine Macarty, and remained in Louisiana until his death.⁶ Blaque took Laffite's letter to Governor Claiborne. Laffite's meant to alert the city's leadership to the fact that the British had arrived and had begun their invasion. But Claiborne was overcome by feelings of jealousy and revenge. He misdirected the Committee on Public Safety that he convened.⁷ He convinced his military advisors that Jean Laffite had joined the British, and had turned into an enemy of the United States. In this manner, Claiborne was justified in ordering the American military officers, Patterson and Ross, to raid Grand Terre as part of the war efforts.

In the previous chapter we described what was about to unfold. Commodore Patterson attacked Grand Terre on September 15, 1814. The Baratarians first thought it was the British vessel with Captain Lockyer on board that had come back to find out what Laffite's decision would be. When they discovered it was an American vessel, Laffite ordered his men not to open fire but to flee. Patterson's men were well prepared for the assault, the Baratarians were taken by total surprise. They dispersed in all directions and probably most of them escaped. The American troops were, however, able to arraign 80 men. Those arrested included two local celebrities as their "prize captives," Barthelemy Lafon, the engineer of the Seventh Military District, and Pierre Laffite, Jean's brother. Patterson later announced he had seized the

⁶ Delphine Macarty remarried after Blaque's death a certain "Dr. Lalaurie" and as "Madame Lalaurie" she gained in later years the number one place among Louisiana's most horrible persons. She had tortured to death her enslaved domestic servants with such cruelty that her house where she was abusing them is considered to be the most haunted house in the French Quarter to this day. For more information on this story see Carolyn Morrow Long, *Madame Lalaurie—The Mistress of the Haunted House*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2012.

⁷ Consisting of Major-General Jacques Villere of the Louisiana Militia, Commodore Patterson of the US navy, and Colonel Ross of the Regular Army (Chapman 2015: 73).

entire Baratarian fleet of "...six fine schooners, one felucca, one brig, cruisers and a prize." Colonel Ross from the Regular Army who collaborated with Patterson in the anti-piracy campaign sent a letter to Claiborne from the scene that was later published in the *Louisiana Gazette*.⁸ It begins: "We are in possession of all of the flotilla except a schooner that was burnt on water's edge..." In all, twelve vessels fell into the hands of the American authorities along with the eighty prisoners and "a large quantity of merchandise."⁹ Lafon, prohibited from obtaining bail, spent more than two months in the *Calaboso*, (State Prison), for piracy. He was accompanied by the other incarcerated captives.

It appeared that Claiborne had won this round over Laffite, but that was not the end of the story. Two months later, General Andrew Jackson arrived in New Orleans. He was the new commanding officer of the Seventh Military District. He immediately ordered Martial Law in the city. Under his emergency powers he also reconsidered the status of the imprisoned Baratarians. He freed them. He also granted them immunity from punishment and suggested that should they perform their duties well, he would return their confiscated ships and merchandise. Jackson provided the pirates a chance to redeem themselves as American patriots, which they did in the war effort of the winter of 1814/1815.

Claiborne vs. Laffite Round 3:

Bravery, Patriotism, and Broken Promises in the Aftermath of the War.

After the Battle of New Orleans, the Laffite brothers and their men faced a dire situation. Their warehouses and homes on Grand Terre at Barataria Bay had been destroyed and their assets had been confiscated by the American military, leaving them penniless and vulnerable. For most residents of New Orleans, the war effort consisted of merely a few weeks or months of service. For most, leaving one's business or employment short-term did not result in financial ruin. Even at that, there was a major rebellion against General Andrew Jackson. He refused to lift Martial Law from the city for six weeks after

⁸ September 24th.

⁹ Chapman, *But for a Piece of Wood*, p. 75.

the victory on January 8, 1815. The citizen soldiers could not recognize the need for their continued service. Many of them deserted to tend to their businesses before their military assignment had ended. By comparison, Lafon's sacrifices were larger. Unlike almost any other soldier from New Orleans, his service did not begin in December of 1814 with Jackson's arrival in the city. It had begun from the beginning of the threat in 1812, and terminated almost three years later, interrupted only by his stay in prison. We don't know what pay he received, if any. Lafon's and Latour's military muster rolls are missing from the National Archives. With the exception of some letters from and to the Department of War, there is no official military documentation proving their involvement as Jackson's engineers. Their service is not recorded in any archival source, other than the surveys which they produced. However, we do have Latour's seminal *Historical Memoirs*, the first detailed and comprehensive historical account of the war, and the Battle of New Orleans. Jackson's two hard-working French-born engineers, Latour and Lafon, were operating at the rank of Major. As such, they should have received \$50.00 per month in salary plus a horse for transportation and full provisions.¹⁰ We don't know whether they received any of that. It becomes clear, nevertheless, that even if they had seen a payment on this level, that would not have compared to what Lafon would have made as surveyor/architect/businessman at the time. Because he had abandoned his architecture, surveying, and his other business ventures, he accumulated substantial debts, and his time in prison didn't help. By the end of the War, Lafon was financially ruined, mainly because of his unwavering patriotism.

In the aftermath of the War, Lafon and the Laffite's tried to reclaim their lost property that, according to the agreement with Jackson, should have been returned to them. But, they were never able to do so. They lost their law suits and suffered harassment and even humiliation. In this moment of despair their spiritual advisor came to their rescue. The Laffites and Lafon were good Catholics after all, not

¹⁰ Ina Fandrich, Unpublished Lecture on the Free People of Color, presented at the Annual Battle of New Orleans Symposium, January 6, 2019, at Nunez College, in Chalmette, St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana. I consulted every muster roll of all the soldiers in three battalions of the Louisiana Militia, two battalions of free people of color, and the Orleans battalion of white local Francophone Creoles. These materials are housed in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. None of these records have been microfilmed or digitized so far. The muster rolls reveal the pay rate of for those of each military rank.

unlike the character of Michael Corleone from the *Godfather* trilogy. They had all their children baptized at St. Louis Cathedral and as far as we know, participated in Holy Communion services regularly when they were in town. The priest at St. Louis Cathedral, Friar Antonio de Sedella, alias Père Antoine, was the city's most beloved priest. He was also a close family friend of Lafon and the Laffite brothers, and, perhaps, a closet freemason.

Unbeknownst to Governor Claiborne, a Protestant, the good Rector of the Cathedral was, as we know now, the unsuspected ring leader of a vast Spanish spying network. He successfully recruited his parishioners, Lafon and the Laffites, and, together with them, their friend, Arsène Lacarrière Latour, to work as secret agents for His Catholic Majesty the King of Spain. Again, we don't know exactly when Sedella started to recruit Lafon. However, the rather mysterious military map of New Orleans, dated 1806, suggests that their association was long.¹¹ In the end, the Laffites, and Lafon left for Texas, established themselves in Galveston, and went on secret missions to explore large parts of this then little-known territory, all while being on the pay-roll of the Spanish Crown.¹²

In 1818, Lafon returned to New Orleans to make a final attempt to rescue his tarnished reputation. When that failed, he tried to sell his assets and had plans to return to his native France, but he died of yellow fever in 1820, before being able to do so, just blocks away from his friend and renowned fellow architect, Benjamin Henry Latrobe (Caldwell in Poesch and Bacot, eds, 1997: 176). In the end, Claiborne won the last round of this competition between him and Laffite, the pirate. By 1820, and with the exception of Dominic Youx, nearly all the leading pirates were either dead or gone, but Claiborne didn't live to see his victory. He had already died before Lafon and the Laffites in 1817.

Conclusion

¹¹ Refer to Chapter 4, Fig. 4.22.

¹² For more of their adventures, triumphs, and defeats in this connection see Davis, *The Pirates Laffite*, chaps. 12 through 17.

Was Lafon a criminal then? Did he commit treason? If he did, nearly everyone else in town was a treasonous criminal as well in Territorial Louisiana. Lafon's problem was not that he was a pirate but that he was caught as such by the US authorities during war times and that made him vulnerable. He got caught during the raid of Barataria in September 1814, while most of his cohorts from the ranks of the Louisiana elite were able to escape. All wealthy white men of the region had business ties to the smugglers at least from time to time. Everybody who could afford it went shopping in Laffite's warehouses in Grand Isle. But as soon as the War was over, the leading white men of New Orleans were eager to establish themselves as unwavering American patriots within the booming new American port city. Thus, former collaborators and fellow members of the newly established American State's upper class (influential planters, merchants, and politicians, Creole old stock and Americans new-comers alike) collectively turned on Lafon. By branding him a criminal, they were able to use him as a scapegoat together with his friends, the Laffite brothers. Lafon became an outcast shunned by society. By the time the War was over, Lafon could easily be dismissed. He had trained superb surveyors such as Joseph Pilié, who could do his job just as well as he could, and there were other good architects and surveyors that had made New Orleans, the nation's biggest boomtown at the time, their home by then. In short, Lafon was no longer indispensable as he had been at the time of the Louisiana Purchase. As of the Laffite brothers, they fared in similar fashion, because they, too, were no longer indispensable. Commerce was now wide open, the port was booming, and much needed supplies could be attained legally that weren't easily available before the War. That included the most desired "commercial supply" of all: enslaved African field hands for the ever-so-voracious sugar cane fields. As the inner-American trade in human flesh between the Upper South and the Lower South started to kick in, smugglers were no longer needed to bring in the highly desired human cargo.

Lafon's friend and business partner Latour, by contrast, lucked out. He, too, was a prominent fellow Baratarian. However, by chance, Latour was either not in Grand Terre on the day of the fateful raid or was able to escape the American military. Hence, he could save his reputation, while Lafon was unable

to do so and remained a *persona non grata* until his untimely death in 1820. As of his spying activities, who can blame a man who follows the advice of his priest?

CHAPTER 8.

REFLECTIONS ON AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE:

Ina Fandrich

Lafon was a gifted, dedicated, and hardworking man who amassed quite a fortune at times in his life. Based on his net worth alone, he should have had easy access to the cliquish network of leading men in the Territory of Orleans, which, after 1812, became the State of Louisiana. This was the very same elite of leading planters and merchants who then filled the ranks of government positions on the municipal and on the State level. In the end, despite his obvious talents and drive, Lafon failed to establish himself successfully within the ambitious, wealthy, and capitalistic-minded elite of the City. It has been argued that his inability to become one of them was connected to his misfortune of having been caught in Barataria during the raid of September 1814. That, of course, was a serious set-back, but, as it turns out, that was only one facet of the story, and perhaps even not the central determinant that his increasing social isolation during the last five years of his life – a time when he became a virtual social outcast and *persona non grata*. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the leading families of Early American Louisiana during the Territorial and early Antebellum Era, were for the most part, white Francophone Creoles, Saint-Domingue refugees and emigres from France, and white Anglophone land speculators, lawyers and businessmen of American, Irish and British extraction. Together, they maintained a society based on racial hierarchies. Their wealth was inexorably connected to the institution of slavery. In order to justify the exploitation of their enslaved work force, they had to defend white supremacy. Hence, just like the Virginian planters' elite of the Jeffersonian Era, they did not consider slavery "a crime against humanity," as any international court today would do. Insistence on racial inferiority of non-whites was the ideology that fueled the legal and moral justification of enslaving human beings considered deserving of relentless powerlessness based on their alleged inferiority. Jefferson's great idea of a "Republic of Liberty" was really disingenuous as its core. If only white male land-owners are considered citizens, all women and all non-whites in their territory would not count as citizens and even as fully human. White

women were elevated in order to produce the next generation of “pure white men landowners” and non-whites collectively were maligned and de-humanized. The relentless ethnic cleansing of Native Americans from their traditional lands was justified by rendering them unwanted barbarian savages. Enslaved Africans were rendered “real estate property” and reduced to a cattle-like status. Ultimately, noncompliance with the system of imposed mores was unacceptable.

Lafon didn’t marry a rich white Southern belle, who would have helped to make him a member of the tightly knit, privileged network of leading families. He also didn’t have a far-away white wife back in France like his friend Latour. That might have provided him an advantage based upon moral vindication. Even if he had remained a bachelor with a celibate life style within the public arena, like Julien Poydras, Judah Touro, or John McDonough, he might have acquired broad social approval. None of these people had been born in Louisiana. None had difficulty fitting into the network of the local white elite, or conducting business within that social stratum. We know today these same “bachelors” did have secret sexual encounters with black women who had offspring with them, but these secret encounters were considered acceptable just as occasional visits to houses of prostitution were tacitly tolerated. In contrast, Lafon’s private life violated the moral, albeit the hypocritical, etiquette of the day. A leading white man in good “moral” standing could have as many non-white mistresses in private as he wanted. To enjoy “bestly urges” with a “bestly subhuman being” was quite alright. However, openly living with a non-white woman and making a public commitment to such a person, in other words treating her as his “lady” and not a convenient temporary “wench,” that raised social and moral discomfort. Lafon had done exactly that. His beloved life partner, Modeste Foucher, was a free woman of color. During Spanish sovereignty a different moral standard prevailed. Their social system, though not without racially-based social hierarchies, was not primarily built on racial differentiation. Blood lineage and devout membership in the Roman Catholic Church was good enough to make it into the colonial upper class, very much to the chagrin of the French *ancien régime*. Saint-Domingue refugees that had arrived in New Orleans escaping the bloodshed of the Haitian Revolution. They brought with them the values and social rules of the three-

tiered Caribbean social and legal system. It was that system which ultimately destroyed French domination in the tropical Atlantic World.

Almost all the new francophone leaders of the newly developing American City Council had deep connections to the former St. Domingue. As former St. Domingue planters, merchants, and international traders, they all had ultimately profited from the Plantation system with its enslaved work force. Now, resettled in Louisiana, they reinforced the local Creole social system with its close similarities to other Caribbean plantation societies. They forged quick alliances with similarly-minded Anglophone newcomers, their American allies with ties to the Virginian planters, who sought to enrich themselves in the same manner. Here were new burgeoning markets in cotton and sugar,

Yes, Lafon was a ruthless pirate in his spare time, when he wasn't a sophisticated surveyor, designer-builder, planter, business man, land developer, alderman, military engineer teacher of mathematics and astronomy. Ironically, being at the same time a bloody thug was apparently not much of a problem in early American Louisiana. If anything, it seemed to have been an asset as "real" men were expected to be tough, resourceful, and rule-breakers. When examined closely, just about all leaders of Lafon's time had shady double lives. Most would grab their arms in a heartbeat to attack someone when need be. Most dealt with questionable business partners. Many kept up secret ties to foreign countries such as the Spanish or the French Empire, or both simultaneously. In fact, we know that Governor Claiborne had a hard time making inroads within the local elite because he did not fit that mold. He was a soft-spoken, handsome and timid gentleman who despised violence and avoided any kind of conflict as best as he could. Although perceived as a weakling, he was ultimately able to redeem himself by supporting his earlier francophone critics, and by marrying into the local francophone elite, not once, but twice. By becoming the husband of a "pure" white young woman from Louisiana he was accepted into the ranks of the elite as one of their own and "part of the family" so to speak. With shared kinship ties, it was easier to overlook his earlier poor decisions and actions.

In contrast, Lafon continued to publicly and unashamedly accept Modeste Foucher as his exclusive partner. For him, she was more than simply a sex partner, but his life companion in every way

that counts. Perhaps that was beyond acceptable in the eyes of an elitist cohort which depended in large part on racial exclusion for its solidarity and admiration. Lafon was probably perceived as a morally dangerous “race traitor.” That being his status, it was easier to malign Lafon with self-righteous indignation, accusing him of much the same kind of criminal behavior which they, themselves, profited from. This was fully consistent with the increasing social antagonism against successful *gens de couleur libres* of early American Louisiana. Their very existence was perceived as offensive to the increasing strength of the redefinition of the racial social order, upon which wealthy white-supremacists depended for their exclusive powers and privileges. Lafon was not alone in his disgrace. He was in good company with the great engineer and inventor Norbert Rillieux, who revolutionized the sugar production industry for all of Louisiana. Others tainted by racial bias of the times included the amazing violin virtuoso Edmond Dédé, who later made a name for himself as the director of the Symphony of Bordeaux in France, the gifted playwright Victor Séjour, who went on to become a sensation in Paris, and the brave outspoken civil rights fighters and fierce abolitionists Jean Baptiste Roudanez and his brother Dr. Louis Charles Roudanez, who defiantly remained in New Orleans and published the first daily Black newspaper of the United States. They all had to be rendered invisible and, subsequently, nearly vanished completely from the public gaze and collective memory of a racially-biased white-supremacist America that had no place for them. It is only now, in the dawn of the twenty-first century that American scholars are rediscovering, one by one, these all-but-forgotten great men (and women) and their remarkable achievements that had slipped into the oblivion of a society which reflected the gaze of the white elite.

Many examples of this kind of erasure in history might be described. The infamous Laffite brothers, Lafon’s Privateer partners had no “pure” white wives to support their moral acceptability. They had black partners, two sisters at that, and became racially tainted. Like Lafon, they were branded as criminals and had to leave town. Laffite’s brother, Pierre, had a mulatto daughter who married a Haitian refugee, a free man of color. Between 1805 and 1830, Pierre Roup built many houses in the Quadroon Quarter, and in Faubourgs Tremé and Marigny. Many of these were in the style of the urban *ti-kay* or shotgun house of Saint-Domingue, his homeland. Roup played a large role in introducing and

popularizing the shotgun house in New Orleans. He, too, has been largely forgotten by history (Edwards 2009). By the same token, the Pirate “brother,” Dominique Youx, was as deeply enmeshed in piracy and smuggling as the others. He was most likely not a biological brother of the Laffites, but a “brother” in the sense of a fellow immigrant from southwestern France, and a close partner in their crime ring. Youx did marry a good local white woman and was successfully able to socially redeem himself after the War of 1812.

This, ultimately, may be why Lafon’s story is so very important. Clearly an energetic and creative genius, as able as any other leading figure in New Orleans society of the time, Lafon’s light grew increasingly dimmer following the Battle of New Orleans. It was the period of the rise to domination of a new elite in New Orleans and the South, one in which Lafon had become an antique and a has-been, and someone whose imperfections might be easily exploited in an increasingly contentious and competitive atmosphere. Perhaps it is time to reignite that long-extinguished light and revisit his remarkable achievements as architect and civil engineer, as surveyor and cartographer, and as a creative thinker of greater ideas. Though, like many of his contemporaries, a highly imperfect human being, Lafon carried a torch which ought not to have been so easily extinguished in the turbulence of its time. The remarkable success of the four children of Barthelemy and Modeste demonstrate something of the legacy which Lafon might have provided to a broader, less race-obsessed, and more appreciative generation. Some of Lafon’s gifts to America survive in the layout of neighborhoods such as the Lower Garden District, in the eighteenth-century buildings which still stand proudly on Royal, Chartres and Bourbon Streets in New Orleans, and through his invaluable assistance in Jackson’s fabulous victory which insured that the new Southwest would remain American in the face of almost insurmountable odds. Let his torch shine a bit brighter through the fog of time.

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